

INSPECTION REPORT

THE BULMERSHE SCHOOL

Woodley, Reading

LEA area: Wokingham

Unique reference number: 110062

Headteacher: Mr P Lewis

Lead inspector: John Godwood

Dates of inspection: 8 – 12 November 2004

Inspection number: 268954

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 11-18
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1335

School address: Chequers Way
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Reading
Berkshire
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Telephone number: 0118 9353353
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Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of Mrs K Daish
governors:

Date of previous January 1999
inspection:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Bulmershe School became a specialist sports college in September 2004. It received the DfES schools' achievement award in 2001, 2002 and 2003 and has the Sportsmark award. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds in Woodley and east Reading, and the school's socio-economic context is relatively disadvantaged overall. Students' attainment on entry is below average. A quarter of students have special educational needs, which is above average, and of these 50 have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The most common needs are emotional and behavioural difficulties, though a significant number of students have learning difficulties or autism and a few have communication difficulties, sensory impairment or physical needs. The school houses a local education authority learning resource unit for 10 students with specific learning difficulties; these students spend most of their time in mainstream classes, but receive specialist support in the unit. One third of the school's students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest group is of Pakistani origin, but there are also significant numbers of students from Indian, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds. One in six students speaks English as an additional language, which is well above average, including 20 students who are at an early stage of learning English. Students' mobility is

above average. The school has a sixth form that is average in size and has grown over the last four years. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
18242	John Godwood	Lead inspector	
9756	Ken Parsons	Lay inspector	
13734	Harold Davies	Team inspector	Law, work-related learning
33473	Andrew Housley	Team inspector	Geography, citizenship
12408	Alan Frith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages, English as an additional language
18542	Gerald Griffin	Team inspector	Design and technology, information and communication technology
31135	Rachel Hobson	Team inspector	English
24891	Jackie Johnson	Team inspector	Mathematics
3643	Derek Jones	Team inspector	Sixth form mathematics
8139	Barbara Johnstone	Team inspector	Music
7428	Ray Jardine	Team inspector	Science
20877	David Pink	Team inspector	Religious education
23030	Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education
10053	Janet Simms	Team inspector	Art and design, business studies
2740	Betty Barratt	Team inspector	Special educational needs, history

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The Bulmershe School provides an effective education. Students achieve well overall and reach average standards at all stages. Teaching is good and the level of care is very good. Leadership and management are good, with clear aims to promote the achievement of all students and good use of data to review performance. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form as a result of good teaching.
- The school is inclusive and provides well for students from a wide range of backgrounds.
- The use of ICT in subjects and the ICT course in Years 10 and 11 are both unsatisfactory.
- There is a high level of care for students as individuals.
- Attendance is unsatisfactory, compounded by recent inaccuracies in recording.
- The provision for students with special educational needs is very good.
- Curricular planning does not ensure there are courses to meet the needs of all students.
- There are good systems to track students' progress and evaluate the school's performance.
- The quality of middle management is often good, but in a few cases slows progress.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities, including opportunities for gifted and talented students and an excellent range of sports.

Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have risen, particularly in GCSE results, although attainment on entry has fallen. The quality of teaching has improved. Good progress has made on the key issues in the last report, which required improvements in planning, monitoring and assessment and a stronger focus on attainment. Not enough progress has been made in ensuring all students receive their entitlement for ICT. The school has gained sports college status.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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.*

Achievement is good overall. Year 9 test results are average in English, mathematics and science and above those of similar schools. Current standards in Year 9 are average

and students achieve well. Achievement is good in most subjects and very good in physical education, but satisfactory in modern languages, ICT and religious education. GCSE results are average: they have steadily improved and in 2004 were the best yet. Results are below those of similar schools because some students of Year 11 age were in a different year; those who took examinations achieved as expected in relation to their Year 9 results. Current standards in Year 11 are average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Achievement is good in many subjects, including English and modern languages, and very good in art, music and physical education. Achievement is satisfactory in mathematics and science and unsatisfactory in ICT. Students with special educational needs achieve well throughout the school. Students from ethnic minorities and those with English as an additional language achieve as well as other students. In the sixth form, standards are average and students achieve well.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. Moral and social development is good. Attitudes are satisfactory: most students enjoy school and take part in activities, but attendance is below average and is unsatisfactory. Behaviour is satisfactory overall: most students behave well but a minority cause problems and exclusions are above average. Behaviour in the sixth form, however, is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Teaching is good. It is good in most subjects and very good in physical education. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is satisfactory in modern languages. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good in music, but satisfactory in science and unsatisfactory in ICT. Most lessons are well planned and meet the needs of all students. Students are well managed and have good relationships with their teachers. Teachers mark students' work well and they are well prepared for examinations, but do not make enough use of ICT. Students with special educational needs are well taught and well supported in class.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Special educational needs provision is very good and there are additional opportunities for gifted and talented students. There is a work-related programme for a small number of students but not enough vocational courses open to all students. The sports college plan has as yet had little impact on the rest of the curriculum. There is a good range of enrichment activities. The school has sufficient computers but the use of ICT in subjects and the ICT course in Years 10 and 11 are unsatisfactory. Care is very good; support and guidance are good and particularly good in the sixth form. Links with parents and the community are good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The school has clear aims to meet the needs of all students and to focus on achievement. The headteacher provides good leadership and is well supported by many other managers, though there is some variation in the quality of middle management that limits progress in raising standards. Management is good. Planning is clear and systematic and the school makes good use of data to track students' progress and to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in school performance. Governors make a satisfactory contribution. They know the school well and are very supportive. Two statutory requirements are not met. The school does not provide a daily

act of collective worship for all students because of a lack of large spaces, but through other opportunities their spiritual development is satisfactory. The school has audited its premises for disabled access but has not yet written an action plan to improve access.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are pleased with the school. They are happy with their children's progress and feel that the school caters well for gifted and talented students as well as those with special educational needs. They are in most cases very happy with the level of care and feel that they get a good response if they contact the school. Most students like their teachers and feel that they treat them well. They like the activities and trips. They think that most students get on well, but are frustrated by a minority who are bullies or disrupt lessons.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise standards in ICT and ensure that computers are used to support learning in subjects;
- improve attendance and ensure that accurate records are maintained;
- broaden the curriculum to include courses to meet the needs of all students;
- monitor and support the work of middle managers to ensure that policies are implemented consistently.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship;
- prepare an action plan to improve disabled access.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE BULMERSHE SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The Bulmershe School has a good sixth form. Students achieve well and reach average standards. Students have positive attitudes and very good relationships with their teachers. Teaching is good. The sixth form is well led and managed, though a minority of Year 12 students underachieve because their courses are not well suited to their abilities. The cost-effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Teachers have a high level of commitment and support students very well.
- Students enjoy sixth form life and have good attitudes to work.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities.
- Students' personal development is enhanced by the contribution they make to the main school and the community.
- The curriculum does not include courses that meet the needs of all students.
- Some students are not given enough guidance in Year 11 to ensure that they choose appropriate courses.

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	Good in English. Students achieve well and are very well prepared for examinations. Teaching and learning are good, though some students are reluctant to engage in discussion. Very good in French. Standards are above average and students achieve well. They benefit from very good teaching and learn independently, but do not make enough use of computers in their work.
Mathematics	Satisfactory in mathematics. Achievement is satisfactory, helped by students' good attitudes. Teaching is satisfactory, but students do not have enough opportunities to explain their own understanding.
Science	Very good in biology. Students achieve very well and a good proportion gain high grades. They learn very well from effective explanations and opportunities to think for themselves. ICT is not used sufficiently.
Information and communication technology	Good in ICT. A-level standards are above average and students achieve well as a result of good teaching and positive attitudes. They learn independently, but need more opportunities to discuss their work.
Humanities	Good in law. Standards are above average and students achieve well. Teaching is very knowledgeable and students enjoy the subject, but they do not have enough links with professional lawyers.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Good in physical education. Students achieve well as a result of their positive attitudes and good teaching. They develop their skills well in the enrichment programme, but the range of vocational courses is limited.

Business

Very good in the vocational **business studies** courses. Students achieve very well, both academically and personally. Standards are above average. Very good teaching enables students to become independent learners.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Advice, support and guidance in the sixth form are very good. Induction is well organised and helpful, though some students do not receive enough guidance in Year 11 in choosing courses that are appropriate to their abilities and have limited success in Year 12. Students receive very good guidance from their subject teachers, tutors and senior staff. They have targets for their performance in Year 12 and Year 13 and through regular reviews are clear about how well they are performing.

Students contribute to the main school through helping in departments with younger students and take part in community service as well as other enrichment activities. These have a very positive impact on their personal development. Independent study is promoted and students help to run their own affairs through the sixth form committee. Guidance on higher education and careers is effective.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is well led and managed. Relationships are very good and there are clear policies and procedures. The head of sixth form works well with other teachers to support the students. The sixth form has clear priorities for development and its performance is reviewed effectively. The school has recognised that, although there is wide range of A-level courses, the curriculum is very limited in the number of vocational courses, particularly at level 2. A full review of the 14 –19 curriculum is planned, led by an assistant headteacher. Sixth form staffing is subsidised to some extent by the main school budget. As a result, while the sixth form is effective, its value for money is satisfactory. The sixth form does, however, make a significant contribution to the whole school, partly through the school service provided by sixth form students.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very positive about the sixth form and enjoy their learning. They find their teachers and tutors to be very approachable and are encouraged by the mutual respect that exists between students and teachers. They consider that the sixth form is well led. They believe that teaching is good and appreciate the additional time that teachers give them. They believe that there is a good range of courses and feel well guided. They would like to have more computers available for private study.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Students' achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form. It is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Students reach average standards at all stages, even though on entry their attainment is below average. Students who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as others; however, gifted and talented students and those with special educational needs achieve well throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In Years 7 to 9, students' achievement is enhanced by effective additional support in English, mathematics and science.
- Students achieve very well in physical education and in art and music in Years 10 and 11.
- Students with special educational needs achieve well as a result of very good support.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory in ICT in Years 10 and 11.
- The progress of some students is affected by poor attendance.

Commentary

1. Year 9 results have been consistently average in recent years. The trend of improvement has been below the national trend, but the attainment of students when they enter the school is lower now than at the time of the last inspection. In 2003 and 2004, the results were above those of similar schools and students did better than expected in relation to their attainment on entry. Results in English have improved in recent years and the gap between girls' and boys' results is smaller than is found normally. Boys and girls do equally well in mathematics and science.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.6 (32.8)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	35.0 (35.6)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	32.6 (33.6)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 234 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. GCSE results were average in 2004, as they have been in other recent years. They were below those of schools where students attained similarly at the end of Year 9. This is because a number of students were included in the figures because of their age but were in a different year group and did not take examinations. When account is taken of this, students' results are as expected in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9. Results have improved in line with the national trend and the 2004

results were the highest yet attained. Girls do better than boys and the gap is wider than is found nationally.

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	48 (48)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	87 (86)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95 (92)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	32.8 (33.4)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 233 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. For current students, standards in Year 9 are average. Students' attainment on entry is below average and they achieve well. Standards are average in English, mathematics, science, geography, history, art, music and citizenship. Students achieve well in these subjects as a result of good teaching. In addition, students' progress is tracked very carefully and there are effective intervention programmes in the core subjects to support students who are likely to underachieve. In physical education, standards are above average and students achieve very well. Standards are below average in design and technology, but students achieve well in relation to their low attainment on entry. Standards are below average in ICT because, although students are well taught, they do not have enough lessons to cover the course in depth. In religious education and modern languages, standards are below average and students' achievement is satisfactory.

4. Current standards in Year 11 are average and students' achievement is satisfactory overall. Standards are above average in English, German, Spanish, history, music and physical education and well above average in art. Standards are average in most other subjects, including mathematics and science, but are well below average in ICT because students do not cover the full National Curriculum. Students achieve very well in art, music and physical education and achieve well in many other subjects. However, students achieve less well overall in Years 10 and 11 than they do in Years 7 to 9, even though teaching is equally good in both stages. This is partly because students' progress is not monitored as carefully in Years 10 and 11. In addition, achievement is satisfactory in mathematics because previous staffing difficulties have held students back, although teaching is now good. In science, higher-attaining students achieve well, but achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall because each class is taught by more than one teacher and their work is not co-ordinated well enough. Achievement in ICT is unsatisfactory because the course and the teaching are unsatisfactory. Students' below-average attendance also affects their progress.

5. Boys have done less well than girls in GCSE examinations. However, the school has taken some effective measures to improve boys' performance. In Years 7 to 9, the intervention programme has improved boys' Year 9 test results, which in 2003 equalled those of girls. The gap between girls' and boys' results in English is narrower than the national gap in both Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations. In history, careful monitoring has improved standards, with a particular impact on boys' progress. Boys continue to do less well than girls in GCSE design and technology because their progress with coursework is not supervised closely enough.

6. Students with special educational needs make very good progress in reaching their individual targets and in improving their reading and spelling. Their progress is carefully monitored and they achieve well in nearly all subjects. The small number of students who attend the learning resource unit achieve well. They make very good progress in improving their literacy, numeracy and learning skills. Students grow in confidence; many do well at GCSE and go on to further education. Gifted and talented students achieve well because they have many interesting and challenging opportunities outside the curriculum and are provided with additional challenges in some, though not all, of their subjects.
7. There is a tendency for students from White British and Indian backgrounds to perform better in examinations than students from Pakistani and some other minority ethnic backgrounds. In terms of their progress, however, students from Pakistani and other minority ethnic groups achieve at least as well as students from White British and Indian backgrounds and some do better in GCSE examinations than would be expected from their prior attainment. Students who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as other students. In Years 7 to 9, almost all who are at an early stage of learning English are supported by the intervention programme and through this receive support in class and extra help with basic skills. Their progress is carefully monitored and they achieve well. The support is less well co-ordinated in Years 10 and 11 but their achievement is satisfactory.

Sixth form

8. A2-level results at the end of Year 13 were below average in 2003. This was a decline from 2002, when they were average. Results improved again in 2004 and were similar to those in 2002. In the 2004 results, students did better than would have been expected from their GCSE results. Boys do less well than girls, though the difference was less marked in 2004 than in previous years. AS-level results were average in 2003. In 2004, more students gained high grades but the pass-rate declined because of difficulties in some subjects. In mathematics, for example, more than half of the students failed to achieve a grade as a result of staffing difficulties. The pass rate was also low in computing and sociology. Ten students out of 89 gained no passes. AS-level results were high in art and English literature.

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	89.8 (95.7)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	27.6 (39.2)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	206.0 (249.9)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 80 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

9. For current students on A-level courses, standards are average and students are achieving well. In the subjects that were inspected in detail, standards are above average in French, biology, computing and law, and average in English language and literature, mathematics and physical education. Students achieve very well in biology. Their achievement is good in all other subjects except in mathematics, where it is

satisfactory. Students' achievement is supported by good teaching and very good relationships between students and teachers. Students enjoy learning and feel well supported.

10. Standards in the vocational business studies courses – AVCE and GNVQ Intermediate – are above average. Students achieve very well on both courses as a result of very good teaching. They develop well socially as well as academically.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory, but their attendance is unsatisfactory. Students' social and moral development is good; their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance is below average and over the past school year has not been accurately recorded.
- Most students are interested in the life of the school and take advantage of what it has to offer.
- There are good procedures to promote positive relationships, including those between different ethnic groups. The school deals well with bullying and harassment.
- Students are taught to respect the feelings and beliefs of others and helped to distinguish right from wrong.
- Sixth form students have good attitudes and make a positive contribution to the education of younger students.

Commentary

11. Most students like school because they find it friendly and they have good relationships with other students and members of staff. Students and parents appreciate the care and respect that teachers show to students and the additional time that they give. Many students are proud to belong to the school and have a positive attitude to lessons and other activities. Their learning is enhanced by the good relationships that are established in many lessons. A minority, however, have negative attitudes and do not apply themselves fully in their work. There are some students, for example, who move slowly between lessons and a small number who sometimes miss lessons they do not value.
12. In most lessons, teachers manage students well and behaviour is good. In a minority of lessons where classroom management is less secure, there are some students who talk too much or are difficult to control. A minority of Asian boys at times appear disrespectful towards female members of staff. The school has a satisfactory behaviour policy, although its implementation depends too much on individual teachers, rather than providing a fully consistent whole-school approach. It is a school priority to make behaviour management more consistent through staff training and improved monitoring of behaviour. Behaviour around the school is generally sensible. There are few bullying incidents and those that occur are dealt with effectively, to the satisfaction of most parents and students. Recently-arrived Year 7 students do not feel threatened by the large school environment. However, the number of exclusions is

above average. This is due in part to a policy of maintaining a clear line on issues such as swearing at staff. The school has an effective alternative curriculum for a small number of students in Years 10 and 11 who are likely to become disaffected, but has been slower than many schools in providing work-related learning programmes to improve the motivation of a wider range of students.

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	893	84	7
White – Irish	4	5	1
White – any other White background	78	2	
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	21	5	
Mixed – White and Black African	5		
Mixed – White and Asian	5		
Mixed – any other mixed background	8		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	36		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	106	20	
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	8	1	
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	15	3	
Black or Black British – Caribbean	36	11	
Black or Black British – African	39	2	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	16	3	
Chinese	8		
Any other ethnic group	9	3	
No ethnic group recorded	48	2	

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

13. Students with special educational needs have very positive attitudes as a result of the support they receive in the learning support department. Those with emotional and behavioural difficulties are closely monitored and respond very well to the targets they are set for improving their behaviour. The students in the learning resource unit work hard and concentrate exceptionally well, moving from task to task with confidence. They feel secure in the unit and behave very well. They enjoy their lessons and take pride in their success.
14. Students' moral and social development is good. The school has a clear set of moral values, expressed in its motto – 'where everyone matters' – and its core values of 'excellence, trust and tolerance'. These are well known to parents and students. Teachers set a good example and provide students with clear guidance on the school's expectations, which are reinforced through 'colours' and a presentation evening. Students generally show respect for the feelings and beliefs of others and students from different ethnic backgrounds usually get on well. There are at times tensions between students from different ethnic groups, but these are monitored carefully and the school is quick to act when necessary. Students work well together in groups, particularly in drama, physical education, music and business studies. Each student is in one of four houses and inter-house competitions develop their sense of loyalty.

They have some opportunities to take responsibility on reception duty, as reading buddies or as counsellors to younger children. The school council has recently been reformed and provides some students with the opportunity to represent the views of their peers.

15. Spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. The school is unable to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students because of a lack of large spaces, but supports spiritual development through a weekly assembly, links with churches and other faith groups and work in some subjects. Assemblies are generally of good quality. Lessons in religious education, music, history and physical education provide good opportunities to explore spiritual themes. Some tutors use the daily tutor periods to explore social or moral issues, but the quality of these is very variable. Students from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds regularly mix within the school. They learn about their own and other cultures, particularly in religious education, and are prepared for life in a multi-cultural society. The school shows respect for all cultures and Muslim students, for example, were provided with a room for prayer during Ramadan. However, the school could do even more to promote cultural development through capitalising on the diversity of cultures represented within its student and parental bodies.

16. Over the past year, the school has piloted a swipe-card system of recording attendance, with the intention of recording attendance electronically in every lesson. Despite much effort and close liaison with the local education authority's education welfare service, the system has been very ineffective and the school has been in breach of its legal duty to keep accurate registers. There have been many technical difficulties, but the implementation was also not well planned. Shortly before the inspection, the school reverted to manual registers, with secretarial staff entering the data into a computer. There is a need for a clear plan to limit the damage from this situation and to define a way forward. On a more positive note, students are rewarded with certificates for good attendance and there is good liaison with the education welfare officer to support students with attendance problems. The school is effective in encouraging school-phobic students to return to school through the support and reintegration programme that are provided in 'The Base'. A sample of parents are contacted by telephone when their children do not come to school, but given the school's attendance problems, a first-day response for all absences is really needed. The most recent accurate data shows that attendance is unsatisfactory, particularly in Year 9. Although teachers help students who have been away to catch up on the work they have missed, there is inevitably an adverse impact on their learning.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.3	School data	0.9
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.

Sixth form

17. Sixth form students have good attitudes. The great majority enjoy their lessons and other activities. Relationships between students and with teachers are very good: students feel that they are treated as young adults and respond well. They respect the views of others and debate issues constructively, creating an atmosphere in which they learn from each other as well as from the teacher. Most students participate well and take pride in their work. Some, however, are too dependent on their teachers and have not fully acquired the self-reliance that is required in sixth form courses.
18. Behaviour in the sixth form is very good, with most students showing maturity and providing a good example to the rest of the school. Students make a good contribution to the main school. All students take part in school service where they help with younger students in lessons. Some also act as mentors or reading buddies. Their personal development is enhanced by these activities, and by charity work and community service. There are very few incidents of harassment or inappropriate behaviour. Attendance in the sixth form, as far as can be judged from the very incomplete data available, is better than in the main school, and most students arrive at lessons on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. Teaching and assessment are good. The curriculum is satisfactory, but the use of ICT is unsatisfactory. The level of care is very good and students receive good support and guidance. Links with parents and the community are good, but links with other schools are satisfactory.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good in the main school and the sixth form. Assessment is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know their subjects well and prepare students well for examinations.
- Most lessons are well planned to be interesting and to meet the needs of all students.
- Students are generally well managed and have good relationships with their teachers.
- The teaching of ICT is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11.
- ICT is not used effectively to aid students' learning across the curriculum.
- Students with special educational needs are well taught and well supported in class.
- Regular marking and assessment ensure that students have a good understanding of their learning and what they need to improve.

Commentary

19. Teaching is good in almost all subjects. It is very good in physical education and in the GCSE music course. In ICT, teaching is good in Years 7 to 9, but is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11 because expectations are too low and lessons lack interest. Teaching is satisfactory overall in modern languages, but is good in the GCSE courses. In science, the students taking separate GCSEs in biology, chemistry and physics are well taught, but for other classes in Years 10 and 11, teaching is less effective than in Years 7 to 9 because each class has two or three teachers for the respective sciences and teaching and assessment are not well enough co-ordinated.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 175 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (1%)	41 (23%)	78 (45%)	50 (29%)	4 (2%)	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.

20. Teachers know their subjects well and give clear explanations. Demonstrations are effective in subjects such as science, music and physical education. Students' understanding is aided by effective use of a computerised whiteboard in mathematics and by watching relevant videos in religious education. Teachers prepare students well for examinations, particularly in English and history.
21. In most lessons, students are well managed and good relationships support their enjoyment of the subject and their learning. Students particularly enjoy being actively

involved in art, drama, physical education, design and technology, ICT in Years 7 to 9 and business studies. They engage constructively in discussions in citizenship. Good discipline is a feature of geography lessons and is evident in most other subjects. A minority of students are restless in some English lessons, particularly where lessons lack challenge or pace; in a few mathematics lessons, learning is slowed by the behaviour of a minority.

22. Teachers have high expectations and generally plan a good range of activities to make the lesson interesting and to meet the needs of all the students in the class. Students engage well in carefully-planned group work in science, music, drama and business studies. Lessons in history and physical education benefit from teachers' enthusiasm and are well planned to challenge students of all abilities. Planning for the full range of ability is less effective in modern languages in Years 7 to 9 and in a few mathematics lessons. In ICT, the lessons for students in Years 10 and 11 lack challenge.
23. Many lessons offer students good opportunities to think for themselves. The best history lessons, for example, include skilled questioning that develops thinking. In physical education, students take responsibility to plan their own learning and evaluate their own performance. The better geography lessons engage students in making connections between different ideas, but in weaker lessons, their learning is passive. Some lessons in history, mathematics and science do not offer enough opportunities for discussion. In modern languages in Years 7 to 9, neither students nor teachers speak enough in the foreign language.
24. A common weakness in almost every subject is that very little use is made of ICT to enhance the learning of the subject. The exception is business studies, where students use ICT well to research and present their work. Digital photography is used well in physical education to help students evaluate their performance and in art, students use the internet for research. Computers are sometimes used well in citizenship and English lessons. In all other respects, students have too few opportunities to use computers to access the internet, analyse data or present their work.
25. Students with special educational needs are taught well. Teachers are well informed about their individual learning needs and generally use effective methods to meet these. In a minority of lessons, however, they do not plan sufficiently for individual students. In all subjects, students' learning benefits from very good attention from learning support assistants. The specialist teaching in the learning support department is very good: it is motivating and well focused on students' individual targets and, as a result, they make very good progress. Teaching in the learning resource unit is very well informed and carefully pitched to challenge students and sustain their concentration. Tasks are interesting and help to build confidence.
26. Teaching and learning of students with English as an additional language are satisfactory. Those who are at an early stage of learning English are effectively supported in an after-school club three nights a week. Students are given help with reading by older students and in some lessons are aided well by learning support assistants. All teachers are provided with information about students' language needs, though they do not always plan different work for them.

27. Homework is set regularly by most teachers and usefully extends learning. Marking and assessment are good in almost all subjects and provide students with helpful guidance on how to improve their work. In English, for example, marking is consistently thorough and teachers give detailed, helpful advice. In mathematics and music, students' understanding of their learning is enhanced because they are involved in assessing their own work. Students' work is very carefully assessed in history, though marking does not always include enough guidance. Assessment is satisfactory in geography, where there is some inconsistency between the methods used by different teachers, and in modern languages, where students in Years 7 to 9 are not clear about how well they are doing and how they can improve. In ICT, assessment is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and does not support students' progress.
28. The school makes good use of assessment results to monitor and support students' progress. All students are set targets for the end of Year 9 and Year 11 and their attainment is regularly recorded and tracked. This is done particularly well in English, mathematics, science, history, art, business studies and GCSE design and technology. Students who are in danger of underachieving are provided with additional support through booster classes or individual mentoring. Assessment has been significantly improved since the last inspection and its effective use in most subjects has been a key factor in improved standards.
29. Good use is made of assessment data, including value-added, to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in school performance. Many heads of department analyse results to plan improvements in their provision. Through tracking individual students, senior staff are aware of the relative performance of different groups of students, such as students from different ethnic backgrounds, but this is not formally analysed and reported to governors.

Sixth form

30. Teaching and learning are good in the sixth form. Eight subjects were inspected in detail. In these subjects, teaching is good in English language and literature, ICT, physical education and law. It is very good in French, biology and business studies. It is satisfactory in mathematics.
31. In all subjects, teachers use their very good subject knowledge to prepare clear, interesting lessons and to prepare students carefully for examinations. Explanations are clear and questions used well to develop students' thinking. Teaching methods are generally good: French lessons are conducted entirely in French, for example, and in physical education, students of all abilities are fully engaged. ICT is not used enough in biology, physical education or French, though in business studies, students use computers well. Enrichment activities such as visits and speakers contribute well to learning in French, business studies and physical education, but not enough visits are arranged in law.
32. Students' positive attitudes to their studies and very good relationships with their teachers aid their progress. In physical education, for example, there is mutual respect between students and teachers. Business studies students are highly motivated and value their learning. The better lessons give students good opportunities to develop

their independence. In French and biology, for example, students present their research and conclusions to the rest of the class. They also do independent research in ICT, law and business studies. However, students do not make enough oral contributions in mathematics or ICT and are sometimes reluctant to join in discussions in English. Physical education students have limited independent study skills.

33. Assessment is good in most subjects and very good in biology and business studies. It is satisfactory in mathematics. Students are set targets in all their subjects and their progress is monitored carefully by subject teachers and the head of sixth form. Marking is done carefully and in most subjects gives students useful guidance on what they have done well and what they need to improve. In mathematics and biology, students' learning is enhanced because they assess their own work. The guidance they receive in physical education is not always specific enough.

The curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall, but does not meet statutory requirements for the use of ICT in some subjects and for students who do not take a GCSE in ICT. There is a good range of enrichment activities. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for students with special educational needs is very good.
- A good enrichment programme helps to raise standards and broaden the curriculum.
- The provision for ICT has not improved sufficiently since the last inspection.
- There is a limited range of vocational courses for students aged 14 to 19.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 benefit from a work-related curriculum.
- Students' literacy skills are supported well by the intervention programme in Years 7 to 9.
- Gifted and talented students are challenged well by additional activities outside lessons.

Commentary

34. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. In addition to the National Curriculum, drama is taught as a separate subject and is valued by students. More than half the students take a second modern language in Years 8 and 9 and reach above average standards. The citizenship programme is well planned and well taught. Personal, social and health education is effectively co-ordinated. Good use has been made of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy to improve teaching and provide additional support in the core subjects for underachieving students. The National Strategy is not used effectively in all subjects, however. Not enough time is allocated to ICT lessons to teach the more advanced skills to the most able students and little use is made of ICT to support the learning of other subjects. Students who wish to study GCSE religious studies can begin the course in Year 9.
35. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. Since the last inspection, the school has improved the curriculum by providing religious education for all students. Not enough improvement has been made in ICT, however, as students who do not take a GCSE do not cover the full National Curriculum. As in Years 7 to 9, students use

little ICT in other subjects, except in business studies. In science and geography, the statutory requirements for use of ICT are not met. Students choose from a good range of GCSE options, but have a limited choice of vocational courses. There is an alternative curriculum that includes workplace learning for a small number of students who have difficulty coping with a full range of GCSEs, and this is effective in improving their self-esteem and confidence. Curricular planning is sound, but the school has been slow to take advantage of the increased flexibility in the 14-19 curriculum to ensure that it has courses to suit the interests and abilities of all students. This is recognised and a major review of the 14-19 curriculum is currently underway. The curriculum prepares students adequately for further education and employment.

36. The school became a specialist sports college in September 2004. Many of the planned initiatives are ambitious and will require careful management. The school is at a very early stage in implementing the plan and in planning how sports college status will help to raise standards across the school. Implementation has been slowed in order to clarify the management responsibilities and as yet the plan has had little impact on other subjects. Appropriate links with the business community have been planned, though many have not yet been established. The physical education curriculum is broad and makes effective use of the school's very good facilities. The department has a good ethos and older students contribute well through their involvement in younger students' lessons and clubs.
37. Provision for students with special educational needs is very good. Students have access to the full curriculum and receive well-planned additional support. There is a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, with good use of computer software. Withdrawal from lessons is planned carefully to minimise disruption to learning. The learning resource unit provides a very good curriculum for students with specific learning difficulties. Students spend most of their time in mainstream classes and their work in the unit uses specialist resources to improve their literacy, numeracy and learning skills. Older students are helped to prepare for GCSE examinations. Lessons are well focused but the schemes of work are not sufficiently clear or detailed.
38. Provision for students with English as an additional language is satisfactory. Those at an early stage of learning English are well supported by an after-school club. In Years 7 to 9, the majority of students are given additional help through the intervention programme. However, there is no co-ordinated programme for students who are at a more advanced stage of learning English.
39. The school provides a good range of additional activities for gifted and talented students. Students are identified and their specific gifts or talents are known to all teachers. The programme is imaginative and includes clubs in philosophy, Latin and thinking skills, summer schools, visits to universities and trips abroad. Parents appreciate the programme and students enjoy the opportunities and the enthusiasm of the co-ordinator. The support for gifted and talented students in lessons is variable. In English, students have the chance to take GCSE English literature early and the Advanced Extension Award in the sixth form. Students are also well supported in science, history, music, modern languages, geography and religious education. In other subjects, the support is less strong. A full audit of provision across all subjects has not yet been undertaken.

40. Provision for extra-curricular activities is good, with strengths in sport, history, music and modern languages. Most subjects provide revision classes that support examination performance. There is an excellent range of popular sporting activities: inter-house sports competitions involve many students and there are fixtures in a wide range of sports. There is a particularly wide range of language visits to European countries and a popular French exchange. The Year 8 camp supports students' social development. Students have many opportunities to participate in musical performance evenings, bands and school productions.
41. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. The physical education facilities, which are shared with the community, are very good and include an indoor swimming pool, table tennis hall and a superb gymnasium. Two new science laboratories have improved the science provision and the drama studios are well used. The quality of display is good and is particularly stimulating in history and physical education. There are good plans for further improvements to the school's site: key priorities are the curtain walling, which is in a poor state in several classrooms, and improved disabled access. Resources are satisfactory in most subjects, though there are not enough textbooks in religious education. The quality of the computer network has been much improved over the last year and the school now has an adequate number of computers, though the development of ICT has been slowed by a recent fire. Teachers have been consulted over their ICT needs in their subjects and a new computer room is soon to open, but at present many subjects, including art, modern languages and physical education, do not have enough access to computers. Teachers use ICT well to aid their presentations in English, mathematics and science. The library, though improved, has a limited range of books and too few computers.
42. There is a good match between teachers' qualifications and experience and the subjects they teach. Support staff also make an effective contribution to students' learning and release teachers from some of their more routine tasks. Learning support assistants and technical support staff are highly effective. ICT equipment is well managed. A member of the non-teaching staff has been trained in behaviour management and effectively deals with behaviour issues where a senior teacher would normally be involved. The school has appointed and trained six cover supervisors, who supervise classes when teachers are away.

Sixth form

43. The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory. There is a very wide range of A-level courses, which is reviewed each year and adapted to meet students' interests. However, the range of vocational courses is limited, including only business studies and leisure and recreation. There are too few level 2 and level 3 vocational courses to meet the needs of all students who join the sixth form. In some years, there are students who do not receive enough guidance in Year 11 and choose courses for which they are not suited. This contributed to a small but significant number of students gaining no AS-level passes in 2004. This was an unusual occurrence and the school is responding appropriately by reviewing the curriculum. There are no specific courses in the key skills of communication, use of number and ICT, though in most subject teachers ensure that students develop the skills that they need. Business studies provision is particularly strong, offering a wide range of popular and successful courses.

44. Religious education is provided through focus days and lectures in the general studies programme given by representatives from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Rastafarian communities. In the timetabled enrichment programme, students choose from a wide range of options such as cooking on a student's budget, life saving and general studies. There is also a popular recreational afternoon including sporting activities and matches. Students develop their initiative and organisation through the Young Enterprise and Young Engineers schemes. There are many trips to the theatre and galleries and the modern languages department offers a good range of foreign visits.

Care, guidance and support

There are very good arrangements to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety. Support, advice and guidance are good overall, and very good in the sixth form. Students' involvement in the school's development is satisfactory and developing.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good induction procedures ensure that students have a smooth transfer from primary school.
- Most students have good, trusting relationships with their teachers.
- Students are involved very well in setting their own targets.
- Students have access to well-informed advice and guidance when they need it.
- The school does not provide careers education for students in Year 7.
- Some Year 11 students need closer guidance in choosing an appropriate sixth form course.
- Health and safety and child protection procedures are very comprehensive.

Commentary

45. Procedures to ensure that the school is a safe working environment are very good. Risk assessments are thorough and the site has been audited for health and safety. Routine safety procedures are in place and no unsafe practice was seen during the inspection. Child protection procedures fulfil requirements and are effective; staff are regularly briefed on their responsibilities and appropriate records are kept. The school works well with agencies such as social services to ensure that students get additional help when they need it.
46. Pastoral care is very good and is commended by parents. Induction arrangements in Year 7 are effective, involving thorough liaison with primary schools and visits for prospective students. Heads of year, teachers and other staff know their students very well. Relationships between students and teachers are good, helped by the fact that tutors move up through the school with their form, and students are confident that there is an adult they could go to with a problem.
47. Students' progress is monitored well. Form tutors meet individual students and their parents to set their targets. They subsequently help students to track their own progress and to evaluate their achievements on review days. Students' involvement in the process aids their motivation and effort. In Years 7 to 9, students' progress is

carefully monitored and additional support provided through the intervention programme where appropriate. Monitoring is less thorough at a whole-school level in Years 10 and 11, though it is done well in many departments. The school has recently started a programme of mentoring specifically for Muslim students by professional Muslim people from the local community. This is a potentially constructive development, but it is too early to judge its effectiveness.

48. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and guided. Their progress is assessed systematically and their targets are updated in regular reviews of Statements of Special Educational Needs. The students in the learning resource unit are very well supported. They are very well known and their progress is closely monitored. There is satisfactory additional support for students who speak English as an additional language and the very few children in public care. The school is effective in putting its motto 'where everyone matters' into practice.
49. The school is keen to consult students about their views of the school and incorporate these in planning school development. Until recently this has been done largely through regular questionnaires on topics such as lessons, schools meals and litter. The school council has recently been re-convened and has plans to consult students regularly through form representatives. Sixth form students have good links with the main school and play a central role in running the school council. The head boy and girl have clearly-defined roles and there are plans to establish a team of associate students who will take responsibilities in conjunction with the school council.
50. Guidance on careers and further education is satisfactory. Students are well informed about GCSE options and benefit from hearing the experiences of older students. The careers programme begins in Year 8, but has not yet been extended into Year 7. Careers lessons in Years 10 and 11 are useful and all students have a careers interview in Year 11. They are well informed about courses in the sixth form and are also given information about courses and open days at other local colleges, though representatives are not invited in to address them. A minority of students choose sixth form courses to which they later find they are not well suited and need improved guidance during Year 11 in their choice of course.

Sixth form

51. Students receive very good support and guidance in the sixth form. Induction is thorough and well organised, involving a week of sample lessons and team-building activities at the end of Year 11. Students meet their tutors regularly and find all the staff to be approachable and helpful. They have performance targets for Year 12 and Year 13 and have two interviews with their tutor each year to discuss their progress. These arrangements are effective and are appreciated by students, who are clear about what they need to do to reach their targets.
52. The head of sixth form works closely with tutors and subject teachers and his support is much appreciated by students. Students receive helpful guidance when applying for higher education. The sixth form also provides well for students' wider needs and they are encouraged to take part in enrichment activities. Students are assisted to study independently in most subjects and are given opportunities to learn how to work in teams. They run their own affairs through the sixth form committee, which manages

the common room and organises social and charity events. Most students very much enjoy life in the sixth form and would strongly recommend it to others.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There are good links with parents and the local community. Partnerships with other schools and colleges are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Annual reports provide comprehensive and helpful information on students' progress.
- The school has a good knowledge of parents' views.
- The partnerships with other schools and colleges that are planned in the sports college bid are at an early stage of implementation.
- Parents are generally pleased with the response they receive if they have a concern.

Commentary

53. Parents are generally supportive of the school and believe that their children are making good progress. They are well informed through newsletters and the school's website. Parents are expected to sign their child's planner regularly, although the rigour with which this is enforced depends on the tutor. Many parents support their children with homework, as the magnificent model castles produced for a history competition testified. The school is quick to contact parents if their child is having problems. Parents have regular opportunities to discuss their children's progress at parents' evenings and target-setting days. Written reports on students' progress are very good, with good quality information on the curriculum, progress and targets for improvement. Parents of students with special educational needs are kept well informed through regular reviews and other contacts. The learning resource unit maintains close links with parents and fully involves them in review meetings.
54. Parents are generally pleased with the response they get when contact senior staff at the school, although a few feel that they have to persevere in order to get a reply. The leadership team has a good knowledge of parents' views about the school and is concerned to respond appropriately. However, the parent-teacher association has disbanded. The school has made a particular effort to build links with Asian parents and has held several meetings specifically for them, supported by the home-school liaison officer.
55. There is satisfactory collaboration with other schools and colleges. Links with primary schools are well developed to ensure that students have a smooth transfer and to gather information about special educational needs. The sports college plan includes objectives to support local primary and secondary schools. Sixth form students help with primary school sport but otherwise the school is at an early stage of implementing these plans. Links with post-16 colleges are limited, though a federation of Wokingham sixth forms is under discussion.
56. The school's proximity to Reading is used to advantage and many local businesses provide work experience. There are useful partnerships with the police, youth groups, churches and other faith groups. The school's buildings are made available for evening

classes and other community use. The sports facilities are shared with the local community. The bid to become a sports college was supported by sections of the local community and the plan will provide additional support for community groups.

Sixth form

57. Sixth form students have good links with the main school and the community. Each student in Year 12 is expected to undertake school and community service. Some students help at an old people's home and others work with younger children at an Asian community centre. Students help to organise sports activities in local primary schools. These opportunities have a positive impact on students' confidence and personal development. The sixth form has good links with Reading University, which provides support with study skills and insights into higher education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides good leadership and leadership of other key staff is satisfactory. Governance is satisfactory. Management is good. The school does not fulfil the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship and has not yet drawn up an action plan to improve access for students with disabilities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's aims to value all students and support their achievement are shared widely by staff and parents.
- The leadership of subjects is good in many cases, but inhibits school development in a few.
- The school uses support staff well to permit teachers to focus on their core task.
- Performance data is used well to evaluate students' progress and identify strengths and weaknesses in provision.
- The monitoring of departmental work has been inconsistent but is now being improved.
- Induction of new staff and staff development are well organised and effective.

Commentary

58. The school has clear aims, which are expressed in its motto – 'where everyone matters' – and in its core values of 'excellence, trust and tolerance'. These aims are known well by parents and many believe that the school is successful in achieving them. The headteacher provides good leadership in catering for the needs of all students and raising standards through improvements in teaching and tracking of students' progress. He is well supported by the leadership team. As a result, most teachers and support staff have a shared commitment to the welfare and success of all students.
59. The school has a very diverse intake in terms of ability, social background and ethnicity. Inclusion is in most respects good. The school values and cares for all equally and seeks to ensure that all students have their educational needs met and

reach their potential. Provision for students with special educational needs is very good in the learning support department and in the learning resource unit. Many additional opportunities are provided for gifted and talented students, though some subjects do not plan sufficiently for them within the curriculum. Students from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together and any potential tensions are carefully monitored and dealt with. The school has a satisfactory race equality policy. It is monitored through reporting any racist incidents and through tracking the progress of all students, though the school does not report the relative achievements of students from different ethnic backgrounds. Students who speak English as an additional language are given appropriate support, though this is not co-ordinated as well as it should be.

60. The role played by the governors is satisfactory overall. Governors are committed to the school and provide good support as well as some challenge. They know the school well, including its strengths and weaknesses, through full reports from the headteacher and staff and through visits to the school. Several governors are new and they are keen to increase their effectiveness through training. Governors are consulted on the school improvement plan, but recognise that they are not sufficiently involved in initiating the school's future direction. In order to become more involved, each governor is this year linked to one of the school's priorities and will monitor its progress. Governors are concerned to fulfil their statutory duties, but two statutory requirements are not met. The school does not provide all students with a daily act of collective worship because of a lack of large spaces and is not up to date with the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act. Governors have considered the act of worship and decided on a policy of weekly assemblies supported by work in some subjects and links with churches; students' spiritual development is supported satisfactorily by these means. With regard to disability access, the local education authority has audited the school's site and governors intend to prepare a strategic plan for the site, but have not yet written an action plan to improve access.
61. The leadership provided by heads of department has significantly improved since the last inspection, when subject planning and evaluation were unsatisfactory. The leadership of subjects is often good and in some cases very good, but there remains some variability, which in a few subjects inhibits the school's efforts to improve provision and raise standards. Leadership is very good in English, history, design and technology and business studies. In ICT, however, the leadership is unsatisfactory overall and has led to poor GCSE results, though leadership of the course in Years 7 to 9 is good and of the sixth form course is satisfactory. Unsatisfactory leadership in geography results in too little development of the subject, though teaching is good. Several subjects – mathematics, modern languages and work-related learning – have temporary management arrangements which provide satisfactory leadership but restrict future development.
62. Provision for students with special educational needs is very well led and managed. It is guided by high aspirations and regularly reviewed. The learning support department is very well staffed with experienced teachers and a large team of learning support assistants. There is close liaison with subject departments and external agencies. The learning resource unit is well managed and is well supported by the school and the local education authority. The head of the unit, who is the only teacher, works in close partnership with the special educational needs co-ordinator and ensures that teachers

are well informed of students' needs. Management systems are largely informal but appropriate for the very small scale of the provision.

63. Management of the provision for students with English as an additional language is satisfactory. The co-ordinator is recently appointed and has not yet taken on full responsibility. As a result, the provision relies on several people, who are all contributing well, and is not fully co-ordinated. Development priorities are appropriate, but the plan is not sufficiently detailed or ambitious in its targets. Teachers are informed about students' language needs, but are not given advice on how to support them. The co-ordinator receives advice from the local education authority, but has not had any specific training.
64. Planning is good. The school improvement plan is comprehensive and clearly lists the school's key priorities. Departmental priorities are closely linked to the whole-school priorities. The improvement plan is backed up by action plans for each priority and subject, which are in most cases well-written and helpful documents. The school makes good use of performance data to evaluate its progress in implementing priorities and meeting its targets. The data gives a clear indication of strengths and weaknesses in students' value-added at each stage and is accurately reported to governors and staff. Many heads of department use data well to track students' progress and intervene where necessary.
65. Performance management is satisfactory. All teachers are observed teaching and agree objectives to improve their students' achievement and to support school development. The work of heads of department is overseen by members of the leadership team. The school recognises that in the past this oversight has not been consistent enough in guiding the work of heads of department and has recently introduced simpler, clearer procedures. The new procedures are well planned and provide very clear expectations of heads of department, but their implementation is too recent to be able to judge their impact.
66. Staff development is well organised and effective. Newly-qualified teachers are provided with good induction. In-service training is matched to the school improvement priorities and makes good use of the expertise of other teachers in the school. The school has in the recent past had difficulties recruiting suitably qualified staff in mathematics and science, but its recruitment strategies are effective and it is currently fully staffed, though it lacks permanent heads of department in mathematics, modern languages and work-related learning. The school is an effective provider of initial teacher training, which has resulted in several trainee teachers becoming permanent members of staff.
67. The school has made good progress in enhancing the role played by support staff in order to enable teachers to focus on teaching and curricular development. Teachers' work is benefited by the appointment of six trained cover supervisors who take lessons when teachers are absent. Teachers are also provided with some support for photocopying and display work. Pastoral teaching staff have support in dealing with students' needs and with administration. Support staff have equal status with teaching staff and are included in performance management arrangements.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4,877,663
Total expenditure	4,820,260
Expenditure per student	3,450

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	12,788
Balance carried forward to the next	70,191

68. Financial management is good. Budget planning is linked to the school's priorities through consideration by the governors' committees, though these links are not made explicit in the school improvement plan. Spending is carefully monitored and the school's budget is well managed.

Sixth form

69. The head of sixth form provides clear direction and good leadership. Relationships are very good, with a high level of mutual respect between teachers and students. Leadership is firm and fair, with clear lines of responsibility. The head of sixth form works effectively with tutors and subject teachers to ensure that all students benefit from their course. Sixth form performance is regularly reviewed and there are appropriate development priorities. The most significant of these is a review of the 14-19 curriculum in order to make sure that there are suitable courses, including vocational courses, to meet the needs and aspirations of all students. Other priorities include increasing students' work ethic, providing additional study skills courses and improving the links between tutors and subject teachers. The sixth form runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

70. Expenditure on the sixth form is currently about £90,000 more than its income, which is two per cent of the whole-school budget. There is no evidence that resources in the main school suffer unduly as a result and the main school benefits from the sixth form. However, the balance between sixth form income and expenditure needs to be monitored carefully. The sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

Provision for work-related learning (WRL) is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum includes a very limited range of vocational courses.
- Work experience is well managed and enables students to learn well through work.
- The alternative curriculum provides good opportunities for a small number of students.
- Most subjects give students opportunities to work in teams and solve problems.
- There is no overall policy or co-ordinator for WRL.

Commentary

71. The school provides a number of different opportunities for students to learn about work and through work. These are not yet co-ordinated into a policy for WRL because

the school is reviewing the management arrangements following a recent retirement. Overall, students have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of work-related ideas.

72. The curriculum includes very few vocational courses, and this limits students' opportunities to learn about work through links with companies. About one third of students choose to take a vocational course in Years 10 and 11 and they achieve well. Most of them take business studies, which is popular and well taught. A small number follow an alternative curriculum that includes a vocational college course in construction, hair and beauty or motor vehicle maintenance. The students who do not take a second language in Years 8 and 9 follow a course in creative enterprise in Year 8 and leisure and recreation in Year 9. A creative enterprise lesson was observed which was well planned and well taught. Students were learning to work in teams and to develop and evaluate their own ideas for a product.
73. The careers programme provides students with satisfactory preparation for work. Through careers lessons in Years 10 and 11, for example, students learn to interpret a payslip and to write a curriculum vitae. In the careers lessons that were observed, teaching and learning were satisfactory. All students take part in work experience during Year 11, which enables them to learn through work and gain direct experience of the work place. Work experience is well organised: students are carefully prepared and their experience is effectively reviewed when they return. The students on the alternative curriculum also attend a work placement for one or two days each week.
74. Most subjects provide students with satisfactory opportunities to learn the skills they need for work, such as problem solving and teamwork. In design and technology, they analyse products and learn about prototypes and mass production. In citizenship, they discuss the skills required in different jobs. However, some other subjects have yet to plan their contribution to WRL and staff training is needed to develop a wider understanding of this area of learning.
75. There is currently no single co-ordinator for WRL, but separate co-ordinators for careers education and work experience. A policy now needs to be written in order to ensure that students' WRL is properly co-ordinated and that they are fully prepared for future challenges and opportunities.

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

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Teachers prepare students very well for tests and examinations.
- Students' progress is carefully monitored and those who are likely to underachieve are well supported.
- Some lessons lack variety and pace because they are not planned thoroughly enough.
- Teaching and learning are not monitored sufficiently rigorously.

Commentary

76. Year 9 results in 2003 were average and above those of similar schools. There has been a rising trend since 2001 and the 2004 results show a further improvement. GCSE results in 2003 were average in English and above average in English literature. Results in English improved in 2004 and were above average and above those of similar schools. English literature results remained similar to those in 2003. In Year 9 and GCSE results, the gap between boys' and girls' attainment has in recent years been narrower than is found nationally.
77. For current students, standards in Year 9 are average. Achievement is good because students' literacy when they join the school is below average. By Year 9, students analyse texts in a straightforward way. Higher and middle-attaining students write quite accurately, but lower-attaining students make a lot of mistakes in their writing. All students are well prepared for the Year 9 tests. Achievement is also good in Years 10 and 11 and standards in Year 11 are above average. Students learn more sophisticated literary analysis. They are introduced to a good range of literature and can explain aspects of characterisation and plot. The highest-attaining students write well-structured essays of an appropriate length, such as one that showed a perceptive analysis of 'The Turn of the Screw'. Lower-attaining students write much shorter pieces and make a lot more mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Students with special educational needs get very good support in lessons and achieve well. Students with English as an additional language also make good progress. Most students express their ideas in discussion clearly, and teachers encourage them to use a good range of appropriate vocabulary.
78. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers know their subject well; they explain ideas and ask questions effectively. A particular strength is the planning of a range of activities to interest and engage students. In a very good Year 10 lesson with a lower-

attaining class, for example, students worked in groups to match descriptive words to the characters in 'A Christmas Carol'. They enjoyed the discussions, ably supported by learning support assistants, and suggested words such as 'sallow' and 'sunken' to describe Scrooge. Written work is consistently well marked, with many teachers taking a lot of trouble to explain to students how they can improve. In a minority of lessons, learning could be better if teachers planned more thoroughly to challenge students and to maintain greater pace. The department is very effective in preparing students for tests and examinations. The use of computers to support learning is underdeveloped.

79. Subject leadership is very good. The head of department has a very clear vision for the subject and teachers work well together to ensure that students reach their potential. Management is good. The arrangements to track students' progress and identify those who are likely to underachieve are very effective. Students receive additional support, such as individual help with reading. The monitoring and evaluation of lessons is at an early stage of development and lacks rigour. The department has made good progress since the last inspection: standards have risen and the quality of teaching and learning has improved.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

80. Literacy skills are average across the school. Teachers have been trained in methods to improve reading and writing, although teacher turnover means that the training has to be regularly repeated. There is very good support for students whose skills are particularly weak. These include a reading buddy programme, in which sixth form students work with younger students. The school makes effective use of the progress units and reading materials from the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. The support for literacy varies in different subjects and in some there are missed opportunities to reinforce good reading and writing. In mathematics, for example, spellings are not regularly highlighted and, in art, students' careless annotation and presentation are not corrected. In science, teachers emphasise technical vocabulary, but students' writing is largely limited to reports. The learning support department and learning resource unit are very effective in developing the literacy skills of students with special educational needs.

Modern Foreign Languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 11 have risen recently.
- Many students benefit from a wide range of foreign visits and excursions.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 are aware of the progress they are making and how they can improve, but younger students are not.
- Students do not use computers to help them with their language learning.
- Teachers do not use the foreign language enough to communicate in lessons.

Commentary

81. GCSE French results in 2003 were well below average, with both boys' and girls' results below by a similar amount. German and Spanish results were above average, though many fewer students took these languages. Students did less well in French than in their other subjects, while those entered for German and Spanish did slightly better than in their other subjects. Boys did better than girls in Spanish, but otherwise, the achievements of boys and girls were similar. In 2004, there was a sharp improvement in French results, which were close to the 2003 national average, accompanied by an increase in the number of students taking the language. Results climbed in German and Spanish to well above the 2003 national averages, though in each case fewer students were entered than in the previous year.
82. For current students, standards in Year 9 are below average overall and students' achievement in all three languages is satisfactory. Teachers' assessments show that standards have improved slightly since 2003. Standards are below average in French and above average in German and Spanish. This is because the school offers the second language only to students who have been successful in French, and attainment is therefore much higher in German and Spanish than in French. Students' achievement improves in Years 10 and 11 and is good in all three languages. Standards in Year 11 are average in French and above average in Spanish and German.
83. Teaching and learning in all three languages are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Discipline is good and teachers establish good relationships with students in most classes. Expectations are pitched high and most lessons are well planned. However, students lack confidence when speaking because teachers do not use the foreign language enough in lessons and hence they do not have enough practice. Very few students use computers to promote their language learning and most are missing out on their entitlement to use ICT in this part of the curriculum. In Years 7 to 9, some lessons are rather slow and a few lack variety. Marking and assessment are satisfactory, but teachers do not all use the same approach and younger students do not know their level of attainment or what they need to do to improve. Tasks are pitched appropriately for the level of the class, but not adapted sufficiently to meet the needs of different students in the class, including those with special educational needs. In Years 10 and 11, on the other hand, lessons are well matched to students' needs and include a variety of relevant tasks. Most students work hard, focusing well on what they need to achieve. Regular assessment procedures ensure that students are aware of their potential GCSE grades and what they need to do to achieve them.
84. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school offers students of all age groups a comprehensive range of visits and excursions to countries where their languages are spoken. The acting head of department provides a good role model of successful teaching and there are high aspirations for all, especially for high-attaining students. However, responsibilities for the three languages and key stages are divided between three people and there is no programme of monitoring to ensure consistency in teachers' practice. As a result, there are inconsistencies in methods of assessment, use of the foreign language and use of ICT. The vision for the development of languages in the school is not sufficiently clear, which means that the good practice evident in some areas of the department's work is not successfully shared. Teachers

do not make consistent use of data provided by the school on students' strengths and learning needs in Years 7 to 9. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in Years 7 to 9.
- Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is adversely effected by previous staffing problems.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good.
- The attitudes and behaviour of a minority of students slow learning in some lessons.
- ICT is not used sufficiently to support the learning of mathematics.
- Management is good: teachers share responsibilities and are committed to raising standards.

Commentary

85. Year 9 results in 2003 were average and well above those of similar schools. The 2004 results were similar, but more students gained the higher Level 6. GCSE results were average in 2003 and similar in 2004. Girls did better than boys in both years. This was evident in a minority of lessons during the inspection.
86. For current students, standards are average in Year 9 and students achieve well. Higher-attaining students solve equations accurately, but middle attainers make some errors when solving equations that include brackets. Standards in Year 11 are also average. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11, but is lower than in Years 7 to 9 because students have some gaps in their knowledge as a result of severe staffing problems last year. Teaching has improved this year and they are catching up. In Year 11, higher-attaining students use the cosine rule to find lengths and angles in triangles. A minority of middle-attaining students are not confident in multiplying decimal numbers by whole numbers. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language achieve as well as others.
87. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers carefully plan lessons that will interest and challenge students and use homework appropriately to extend learning. They give clear explanations and in many lessons make good use of the overhead projector to aid students' understanding. In a very good Year 11 lesson, for example, the teacher displayed graphs on a computerised whiteboard and students clearly understood how to solve simultaneous linear and quadratic equations. In the best lessons, students are highly motivated by activities that involve them all at an appropriate level, but in a few lessons the level of challenge is not appropriate for the full range of ability. Relationships are good and students generally respond well. Students with special educational needs are well supported by learning support assistants. In some less effective lessons, teachers' management of students is insecure and the time spent with a minority of uncooperative students slows learning. Literacy is supported by an emphasis on key vocabulary, but opportunities for students to explain their own thinking are sometimes missed. Lessons end with a review of what has been learned, though the quality of these reviews is variable. Marking is regular and helpful. Students' work is thoroughly assessed and their progress is monitored carefully. Their

understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to improve is enhanced because they are involved in assessing their own work.

88. Leadership is satisfactory. After several years of recruitment difficulties, the department is now fully staffed and two established teachers head the team, with other teachers sharing day-to-day management. Teachers work well together and the department is well managed. All members of staff have full teaching timetables in an effort to minimise the effect of the previous disruption. The local education authority provides good support and guidance. The department is aware that the use of ICT in learning mathematics is an area for development and is beginning to address this. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

89. The development of students' numeracy skills in other subjects is one of the school's current priorities. A co-ordinator has been appointed and an appropriate policy has been drafted. In many subjects, students' mathematical skills are adequate to their needs. In science, for example, students use equations and plot graphs of their experimental results; in geography, they analyse and display data from their fieldwork. The opportunities to use numbers and statistical data are planned well in history, and in art students' spatial skills are developed well through Years 7 to 9. In physical education and ICT, however, the opportunities for students to apply number skills have not been planned into the schemes of work. The school has yet to achieve consistency in the quality of planning across all subject areas.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students in Years 7 to 9 and those doing three separate GCSE sciences achieve well.
- Each double or single award GCSE science class is taught by two or three teachers and this adversely affects students' curriculum and assessment.
- Students with special educational needs make good progress, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- ICT is not used enough to help raise standards in science, by teachers or students.
- Leadership and management have improved since the last inspection and are good.

Commentary

90. Year 9 results in 2004 were average and above those of similar schools. The proportion of students who achieved the higher Level 6 was well above similar schools. The results were an improvement on the previous year. Boys and girls did equally well. At GCSE, most students do double award science, but a significant proportion of higher-attaining students do three separate GCSEs in biology, chemistry and physics. The 2004 results were average overall and average for those taking the separate sciences. The results were similar to those in the previous year and were as expected in relation to students' prior attainment in Year 9.

91. Current students in Year 7 to 9 are achieving well, particularly in their understanding of key concepts and principles. Standards in Year 9 are average, but a good proportion of students achieve above the expected level; for example, higher-attaining students know some of the chemical and physical properties of metals such as their relative reactivity. Students get a good start in Year 7 because practical work is planned well and enables them to explore new ideas. Students with special educational needs achieve well as a result of effective support from teachers and learning support assistants. Those from minority ethnic backgrounds are fully integrated into lessons and achieve well.
92. Standards in Year 11 are average and achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. However, those doing three separate science GCSEs reach high standards and achieve well. They are well taught by very knowledgeable specialists and have enough time to cover the course. In Year 11 chemistry, for example, students testing for the presence of metallic ions speculated about the products from each test and worked out ionic equations to represent their observations. In the single and double award courses, achievement is satisfactory. It is lower than in the separate sciences mainly because each class is taught by two or three teachers respectively, which results in a more fragmented curriculum and affects the development of students' skills. Teachers do not know their students so well and consequently students' progress is not monitored so effectively. The department has recognised this weakness and in Year 10 the number of teachers per class has been reduced from three to two in order to improve co-ordination.
93. Students' scientific enquiry skills are sound, but not as strong as their knowledge and understanding, particularly in Years 7 to 9. They acquire good practical skills, but a lot of practical work is illustrative or exploratory and opportunities are missed for students to make predictions or to suggest working methods. The lack of ICT equipment to gather and present data also constrains their enquiry skills.
94. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11, though the teaching of the separate science GCSEs is consistently good. Most lessons are well planned to include an appropriate balance of whole-class teaching and individual and group work. Teachers' explanations are very clear and are enhanced by well-conducted demonstrations. New vocabulary is emphasised well. In some weaker lessons, however, students do not have enough opportunities to think for themselves and are less involved in learning as a result. Homework is used well to extend the learning from lessons and marking is generally good.
95. The head of science provides good leadership and management. The development plan provides a clear strategic direction and a very sound basis for further improvement. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. There has been good improvement in the use of assessment to monitor and support students in Years 7 to 9. The Key Stage 3 National Strategy has also been used well to raise standards. However, not enough progress has been made in the use of ICT, which remains a weakness.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is unsatisfactory in GCSE classes because expectations are too low.
- The subject is not allocated enough curriculum time.
- In many lessons in Years 7 to 9 students learn well.
- Not enough is made of computers to support learning in other subjects.

Commentary

96. GCSE results in 2003 were well below average and students did much less well than in their other subjects. The results were a little worse in 2004. Girls' and boys' results are similar.
97. For current students, standards in Year 9 are below average but are improving. Attainment on entry is below average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Their understanding of how computers control a sequence such as traffic lights is average. They use appropriate text and graphics when creating a slide presentation, but generally do not use colour effectively. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is good, but students' achievement is limited by a fortnightly gap between lessons. As a result, too much time is spent refocusing and revising work, leaving insufficient time to develop new skills. The achievement of students with special educational needs and gifted and talented students is satisfactory.
98. In Years 10 and 11, about one third of students take a GCSE in ICT. Standards in Year 11 are well below average. Students' understanding of spreadsheets and databases and their level of skill are rudimentary. They have a clearer grasp of word processing and desktop publishing, but most cannot explain the qualities of each software package. Achievement is unsatisfactory and is the result of unsatisfactory teaching. For students who do not take a GCSE in ICT, standards in Year 11 are very low. This is because the school does not provide enough time to cover the National Curriculum. As a result, students' achievement is unsatisfactory. In Year 10, however, more time has been allocated, allowing coverage of most of the National Curriculum. Standards in Year 10 are below average but students' achievement is satisfactory.
99. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall. While in many classes students learn well, there are a significant minority where the standards expected from students are too low. These lessons lack challenge and interest and fail to grasp students' attention or imagination. In the good lessons, which are largely in Years 7 to 9, students enjoy the challenging tasks and behave well because teachers manage their classes well.
100. Leadership and management overall are unsatisfactory. The development plan is not a robust strategy to raise standards and the analysis of GCSE results does not give an accurate diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses. The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements for some students in Years 10 and 11 and assessment is not used effectively to help students' improve their work. The provision for Years 7 to 9 is managed separately and here, leadership and management are good, with a real commitment to raising standards. Assessment is well planned and is used well to raise standards. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. The use of ICT in

other subjects remains a weakness, as does teaching and achievement in Years 10 and 11.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

101. The use of ICT to support the learning of other subjects is unsatisfactory. There is no coherent plan for the use of the computer facilities by subject departments and, as a result, students have too few opportunities to practise and develop the skills they have learned in their ICT lessons. In the past, a lack of computer facilities has been a limiting factor, but the number of computers has been significantly increased over the past year. There are now adequate facilities, though the improvements are very recent and most subject teachers have not yet taken advantage of them. The use of ICT is a weakness in most subjects, though it is used well in business studies. Some good use was also seen in English, where Year 8 students made good use of computers to draft and edit their work. In citizenship, students use computer software to develop their thinking skills through creating concept maps.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are well focused.
- Students are well managed and behave well.
- Teaching and learning are not monitored sufficiently to ensure consistency of practice or to share best practice.
- There is not enough development of the subject and progress since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

102. GCSE results in 2003 were average and students did as well as in their other subjects. Results improved a little in 2004.

103. For current students, standards in Year 9 are average. Attainment on entry is below average and students achieve well. Students work hard in lessons and complete their written work carefully. In Year 11 also, standards are average and achievement is good, though it is slightly better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. In their GCSE work, students research topics and apply their knowledge well, for instance in explaining the reasons for re-cycling waste and the need to reduce packaging. When they are given the opportunity, students engage well, ask perceptive questions and are keen to do research. In a good lesson on latitude and longitude, for example, students were involved in a lively discussion about time zones and the date line. In some lessons, however, teaching does not involve students enough and achievement is only satisfactory.

104. Teaching and learning are good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and just over half of the lessons were good. Consistent, sound teaching is an important factor in students' achievement. Teachers are experienced, have a good knowledge of the subject and focus on what students really need to learn. Behaviour management is confident and effective and, as a result, all students concentrate well, including those with special educational needs. Lessons are well planned and make good use of time. Where teaching is good or very good, teachers use a wide range of methods and involve students in doing research and thinking for themselves; as a result, they are interested and develop good questioning and enquiry skills. In the less effective lessons, students follow the teacher but learn passively; they do not find the work so interesting and do not make strong connections between ideas from different parts of the course.
105. The management of the department is satisfactory, but leadership is unsatisfactory. Procedures are properly carried out, resources are adequate and assessment data is used appropriately to set targets for students. The management of behaviour in and around the department is good. However, there is little developmental work, particularly in teaching methods that engage students actively in learning. There is no formal observation of teaching or monitoring of classroom work, which restricts the dissemination of best practice throughout the department.
106. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. There have been some improvements in the number of textbooks, provision of fieldwork and the curriculum. Students' knowledge of geographical processes has improved. However, there has not been enough improvement in independent learning, the use of ICT in geography or in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving. Achievement is good, but is lowered by careless writing.
- Teaching and learning are good overall and occasionally excellent.
- Assessment is thorough and is used very well to set targets and track progress.
- Marking is done regularly, but does not always give clear enough guidance for improvement
- The department is very well led and is deeply committed to improvement.

Commentary

107. GCSE results have fluctuated a little over recent years, partly because of staff changes. Results were broadly average in 2003, though students did less well than in their other subjects. They improved in 2004 and were above average. Girls' GCSE results are better than those of boys, though the gap narrowed in 2004. Current standards show continuing improvement. In Year 9, standards are average overall, though standards reached by higher-attaining students are well above average. Standards in Year 11 are above average, broadly matching the recent GCSE results. Students' attainment on

entry is below average and all, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. Boys and girls achieved equally well in the work seen during the inspection.

108. The recent improvement in standards is the result of improved teaching. Students respond very well to teachers' enthusiasm and high expectations. Most students have a good knowledge of historical events and understand the links between them. In a higher-attaining Year 9 class, for example, students skilfully analysed evidence to identify the causes of cholera, and showed an exceptional ability to sustain a logical argument. Year 11 students perceptively explored the events leading to the Cuban missile crisis and one student generated animated debate with the question 'Who won?'. Students develop a good range of historical skills, though their oral work is stronger than their written work. This is weakened by careless mistakes and a lack of structure and, in the work of average and lower-attaining students, insufficient detail and explanation. ICT and numeracy skills are used well in research and presentation.
109. Lessons are very well planned, with a variety of activities to ensure full use is made of the time. Teachers give clear explanations and in some lessons use imaginative methods to enable students to understand complex issues. Year 10 students, for example, gained a good understanding of the political perspectives within the Weimar Republic from a series of involving activities, including a Blockbusters quiz. Learning thrives as a result of very good classroom relationships. Group work is used effectively to match the tasks to students' abilities. The learning of students with special educational needs is enhanced by a good partnership between teachers and learning support assistants. In the best lessons, skilled questioning tests students' understanding and challenges them to think. In some lessons, however, students are not given enough opportunities for discussion or required to develop full answers. Homework is carefully planned to extend lessons and students are very well prepared for examinations. Work is marked regularly, though marking does not always include enough guidance for improvement. Students' progress is carefully assessed and monitored, with appropriate intervention where underachievement is identified. This targeted support has been effective in improving GCSE results, particularly in the case of boys.
110. Students' enthusiasm for history is the result of very good leadership and management. The head of department provides a strong lead and teachers have a shared commitment to improvement. Teachers are supported very well and staff changes have been well managed to minimise disruption. The curriculum is enriched by visits, competitions and other activities. Teaching and learning are systematically monitored and the department promotes a high level of self-evaluation. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in improving standards, especially in GCSE examinations.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students gain a GCSE in religious studies and results are rising.
- Effective teaching helps many students to gain confidence in their learning.

- Assessment is used effectively to help students improve their learning.
- There are not enough books or teaching activities that encourage students to become independent learners.

Commentary

111. All students are entered for a GCSE in religious studies. Most students take a short course and about one in ten take a full course. Results in 2004 were higher than those of 2003. They were below average overall, though many more students take the examination than is the case in most schools. Results in the full GCSE course were above average.
112. For current students, standards in Year 9 are below average. Students' attainment on entry is below average and their achievement is satisfactory overall. Higher-attaining students achieve well, but achievement is not so good for lower-attaining students because there is limited range of suitable teaching activities. Students with special educational needs achieve well as a result of the support they receive from learning support assistants. Standards in Year 11 are average overall, but students achieve well and higher-attaining students achieve very well.
113. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. Teachers have high expectations and students respond well. They are managed effectively and as a result their behaviour is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is confident because it is based upon very good subject knowledge and a sound knowledge of students' capabilities. There are some good opportunities for speaking and listening: Year 9 students, for example, planned their own questions before researching the Bar Mitzvah tradition and, in another Year 9 lesson, lower-attaining students were entranced by the skilful telling of the story of Prince Siddhartha. Video is used effectively to add interest and improve understanding. Boys' interest has been improved by the introduction of new topics, such as one on King David. Work is assessed regularly and students have a good understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to improve. Students' learning is slowed by a lack of literacy skills, especially in Years 7 to 9, and there is not enough emphasis on improving reading and writing. There are not enough books and a lack of suitable texts for students of all abilities. As a result, students do not develop their research and presentation skills sufficiently and learn independently. Time is not always managed effectively, especially in Years 7 to 9, and students are sometimes overloaded with tasks which they cannot complete. This particularly affects lower-attaining students, who are not helped sufficiently to make their own decisions about their learning.
114. The head of department, who leads by example, provides good leadership. Management is good and leads to a consistent approach by all teachers. The department has a good understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses and has appropriate priorities in its improvement plan. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology was inspected in detail and child development was sampled.

115. GCSE results in **child development** were above average in 2003 and students did better than in their other subjects. In 2004, results were average. One lesson was observed, in which teaching was good. The all-girl group learned about pre-conceptual care and the importance of a mother's healthy lifestyle to the baby's growth. A video was used very well to stimulate discussion and all students were engrossed.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well as the result of good teaching and their positive attitudes.
- Students enjoy the subject and work hard.
- Good assessment is raising standards in GCSE classes.
- Boys do not achieve as well as girls because their coursework is not monitored closely enough.

Commentary

116. GCSE results in 2003 were average and students did better than in their other subjects. Results improved a little in 2004. In both years, girls did better than boys.

117. For current students, standards in Year 9 are below average. However, their attainment on entry is well below average and their achievement is good. Students have a complete but superficial knowledge of the design process. The research that they do is relevant but is not used well to guide their plans. Students' practical skills are better than their designing and are average. They use a good range of hand and power tools safely and accurately to cut, fashion and join materials and take care to finish their products to a good standard. Students evaluate their work, but use their personal opinions rather objective criteria.

118. Standards in Year 11 are average and achievement continues to be good. When designing, students make good use of research to inform their planning. They develop a good range of ideas before choosing one to make. Their finished items are often above average in quality. Evaluation of their products is done well, often using surveys to judge success. Students' good achievement is the result of their positive attitudes and good teaching. Students with special educational needs achieve well because of the individual help they receive from teachers. In GCSE classes, girls achieve very well, as do gifted and talented students. Boys achieve less well because their coursework is not regularly monitored against short-term deadlines and, as a result, is often incomplete.

119. Students learn well through challenging work and enjoy the interesting teaching. They cover a lot of work because teachers set demanding time limits for its completion and they behave well as a result of good classroom management. They also learn well from reviewing each others' work. However there are insufficient opportunities for them to use ICT, computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture. In GCSE classes, students' work is carefully assessed and the results are used well to set them

targets and guide them in how to improve their work. Assessment is not used so effectively in Years 7 to 9.

120. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department and his team are committed to raising standards. Comprehensive reviews, good monitoring of lessons and very robust plans are all contributing to rising standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, with all the shortcomings that were identified having been rectified.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design and music were inspected in detail, but drama was also sampled.

121. Students in Years 7 to 9 study **drama** for part of each year in rotation with personal, social and health education and citizenship. There are two GCSE groups in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results were above average in 2003 and well above average in 2004. In a Year 9 lesson, students learnt well about the use of masks in group performances. The lesson was well planned and a combination of high expectations, clear explanations and use of technical equipment contributed to good achievement. Students in a Year 10 lesson were performing prepared scripted pieces, which the teacher videoed in order to assess their work in a future lesson. Students watched one another respectfully and were encouraged to give each other helpful feedback.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because teaching is good, particularly in GCSE classes.
- The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 has improved and develops students' practical skills well.
- GCSE results have improved significantly and were well above average in 2003 and 2004.
- Students do not develop skills in annotating their sketchbooks early enough.
- Students do not use ICT enough in their creative work.

Commentary

122. GCSE results have improved significantly in recent years and were well above average in 2003 and 2004.

123. For current students, standards in Year 9 are average. Standards on entry are below average and students achieve well, because the curriculum is well planned to build up their practical skills. Students' painting and drawing improve best, partly as a result of good progress in understanding spatial aspects of mathematics, such as proportion and scale. Students also gain sound practical skills in three-dimensional work. This improvement occurs despite large classes and relatively short lessons. Students' written work does not improve so well, partly because of the restricted time.

124. Standards in Year 11 are currently average, but should improve to be similar to recent GCSE results. The department provides very good individual support prior to the examination which significantly raises standards, particularly for boys. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good. Year 10 students have started their course well and are already achieving better than expected, especially in drawing. While the standard of practical work is high, students are weak in adding critical comments to the work in their sketchbooks and in analysing works of art. This is partly a result of low literacy skills, but they do not have enough practice in Years 7 to 9 in noting their ideas about their own work and that of other artists. Students use ICT to do research, but do not routinely use computers for creative work.
125. Teaching and learning are good. GCSE teaching is particularly effective. Students are given very good individual support as they develop their practical work. This is effective in improving the skills of younger students and of developing individual approaches in older ones. Occasionally younger students, particularly those with behavioural problems, lose concentration and waste time, but generally students enjoy their work and gain significantly in confidence as they improve their skills in different media. Students' work is assessed thoroughly; marking encourages students well and their progress is carefully monitored.
126. Leadership and management are good. The department has responded very well to the last inspection report and improvement has been very good. The curriculum and assessment procedures have been improved and standards have risen. Many aspects that were judged to be weaknesses in the last report have since become strengths. Through self-evaluation, the head of department has accurately identified areas for further improvement.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Year 11 are above average.
- Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Effective assessment procedures enable students to chart their own progress in gaining musical skills.
- The school is aware of the need to increase the provision for music technology.

Commentary

127. GCSE results were broadly average in 2003 and above average in 2004. There is a good take-up rate for the subject in Year 10.
128. For current students, standards in Year 9 are average, as they were in the last inspection. Students enter school with below-average musical abilities and achieve well. By Year 9, most have good rhythmic and vocal ability and use these skills to improvise short pieces. Many students sing with an accurate sense of pitch and quickly learn a vocal part. They understand simple chord sequences and create compositions based on a twelve-bar blues. Their performing skills are satisfactory, which is an

improvement since the last inspection. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language achieve as well as others. More musically able students make very good progress in all aspects of their work.

129. Standards in Year 11 are above average, as they were in the last inspection. Achievement is very good. Students understand many different musical styles. They identify key features in a short extract and use appropriate musical vocabulary to describe them. Their compositions have reasonable structure and include development of initial ideas. Most students' performing skills are well developed, both as soloists and as ensemble players.
130. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use their own musical expertise effectively to aid students' learning. Lessons are well managed to allow all students to make a contribution and to comment on the impact of a performance. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, groups of students created and performed their own version of a short vocal piece. Each performance was then evaluated by the other students, who suggested possible improvements. As a result, students gained a better understanding of the characteristics of a good performance. Students' work is carefully assessed and the results are used well to support their progress. Homework is set regularly. Lessons provide satisfactory support for the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills. There are not enough opportunities for students to use ICT in learning music.
131. Peripatetic staff make a valuable contribution to the development of students' musical skills. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities and rehearsal groups include a choir, orchestra and jazz band. Students perform in concerts both in and out of school and also in inter-house music competitions.
132. Leadership and management are good. Planning is good and is well focused on raising achievement. Since the last inspection, schemes of work have been improved and assessment procedures fully developed. The weaknesses that were found in teaching have been successfully addressed. The accommodation is satisfactory and the resources have been increased. Improvement is good, though there are still weaknesses in the provision for music technology.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and positive attitudes lead to very good achievement and above average standards.
- Students' learning is enhanced by their evaluation of their own and others' work.
- Links with the community and other schools are limited.
- The facilities are very good and provide a good basis for a varied curriculum.
- Departmental self-evaluation and planning are not sufficiently rigorous.

Commentary

133. About one in ten students take GCSE physical education. Results in 2003 were well above average and were similar in 2004. Students did better than in their other subjects. Girls did better than boys.
134. When students arrive in Year 7, their attainment is below average. Students achieve very well and by Year 9 their skills in games are above average. They have a good understanding of how to develop skills and they improve their own and each others' performance through observation and coaching. Their spatial awareness and creativity are developed well. Standards are also above average in Year 11 and students continue to achieve very well. Their skills become more refined and precise. They excel in games such as netball, basketball and football. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as others and are often able sports players. Students from different ethnic groups do equally well. Some Asian students are not such strong swimmers, but are given an appropriate course to meet their needs. Students who are at an early stage of learning English make less progress because they have no additional support and cannot always follow the explanations. Standards on the GCSE course are above average, and students achieve very well. Students have good grasp of essential facts. They do research and present their findings with confidence, both orally and in writing. Their practical work is above average. Only a few girls take GCSE, which limits the practical activities that can be offered.
135. Teaching and learning are very good, especially on the GCSE course. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use a good variety of methods to suit the range of students in the class. There is a strong ethos within the department and all teachers have high expectations of performance, dress and behaviour. Students respond very well and enjoy being given responsibility to plan their own learning. They use digital cameras effectively to record their creative activities and improve their practical skills. However, in other parts of the course, they do not have enough opportunities to use ICT or apply their numeracy skills. Assessment levels are not used in lessons to help students improve their performance. Target setting has recently been introduced in the GCSE course and helps students to focus their efforts, though their targets are not sufficiently precise.
136. The teaching facilities are very good and enable a varied range of activities to be offered. There is an excellent range of extra-curricular sports, with a high level of participation and high standards in many activities. Many students take part in the inter-house competitions. However, fewer accredited courses are offered than is usual in a sports college. There is good liaison with the local gymnastics and table tennis clubs, but other links with the community and schools are at an early stage of development.
137. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a strong team of teachers who have ensured good improvement since the last inspection. However, finer aspects of management have been slow to move in line with national trends. Future developments are not planned in any detail and are not innovative. The progress of different groups of students is not monitored to check that all are achieving well and the monitoring of teaching is not sufficiently rigorous.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are above average and students achieve very well.
- Good teaching ensures that students of all abilities achieve their full potential.
- The department provides a good range of options, but lacks a suitable course for very low-attaining students.
- The department has a strong team of teachers and is very well led and managed.

Commentary

138. GCSE results in 2003 were above average and students did better than in their other subjects. Results remained similar in 2004. Boys and girls did equally well. Students have achieved better than expected from their prior attainment for several years.
139. For current students, standards in Year 11 are about average, but are likely to rise significantly by the end of the year as a result of the department's very effective revision programme. The range of students' prior attainment is extremely wide and their achievement is very good. Some lower-attaining students have forgotten learning during their recent work experience, but they quickly recall it as a result of effective teaching.
140. There are three business studies courses in Year 10. In the traditional GCSE course, standards are average for this stage of the course and students are achieving well. There is a new applied GCSE, which has a vocational emphasis. The class consists of lower-attaining students, many of whom have special educational needs. The course is appropriate as students have double the length of time to learn business concepts, which currently they find very difficult. Most students have weak literacy and numeracy and find concentration difficult. Their achievement is satisfactory. A third, newly-introduced GCSE course is of concern because it is too demanding for students' very low abilities. The course has replaced a basic skills course, which was better suited to students' needs. The students are well-motivated, but standards are significantly below average.
141. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. A variety of methods is used that enables students of all abilities to remain interested and engaged. Students move swiftly into groups and work well with others. Teachers plan carefully to accommodate the wide range of ability in each group and work well with students individually to support and stretch them appropriately. Teachers know students' strengths and weaknesses very well and provide very good support for their social development. Assessment is good, and students' own understanding of their learning is enhanced because they are involved in setting their own targets. Students' work is marked promptly, with helpful feedback.
142. The department is very well led and managed. Teachers form a very strong, cohesive team and relate very well to students. Staff are conscientious to ensure that the school's provision matches students' needs. Self-evaluation is good. Resources,

including ICT, are used effectively and the department has a very strong ethos of enjoyment, support and success. Provision has improved well since the last report, when it was already strong.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship was inspected in detail but personal, social and health education was also sampled.

143. All students in Years 7 to 9 have regular lessons in **personal, social and health education** (PSHE). The programme is well co-ordinated and is taught by a small team of appropriately experienced staff. Assessment procedures are being developed. Three lessons were observed, in which teaching and learning were good. There are no specific PSHE lessons in Years 10 and 11, but sex education is effectively taught in science and other aspects such as relationships, HIV and drug abuse are included in citizenship and religious education.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are good.
- Teaching is good and is well supported by the schemes of work and appropriate training.
- Good community links provide students with opportunities to take part in citizenship activities.
- Lessons are not monitored sufficiently to ensure that the content matches the scheme of work.

Commentary

144. Standards in Year 9 are average and students achieve well in their citizenship skills and their understanding of what it means to be an informed citizen. Year 8 students, for example, develop their enquiry and communication skills when they research what people do in different jobs. Year 7 students develop their skills in participation and responsible action through planning activities for people of varying emotional intelligence. The variety of work that students undertake helps them to think, work together and engage in discussion with each other and the teacher.

145. By Year 11, students' knowledge and understanding of citizenship are average and they continue to achieve well. Students gain a good understanding of the impact of the media on public opinion in a democratic society through researching the same story in different newspapers. They use ICT well to develop a full understanding of a complex situation through using mind-mapping software.

146. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are planned well, with appropriate resources, to interest students and involve them in activities. Students are clear about the objectives of the lesson and are involved in evaluating what they have learned. Relationships are good and, as a result, students co-operate well and enjoy learning.

Assessment is used well to inform students how they can improve. Their progress is recorded and monitored.

147. Leadership and management are good. The co-ordinator has a clear understanding of the subject and has worked closely with staff to produce an effective plan. Teachers are well supported by the schemes of work and have received training, though occasionally lessons are not well matched to the scheme of work. The National Curriculum is covered appropriately and students' progress is reported to parents. Students have citizenship lessons and, in addition, specific topics are covered in geography, history, religious studies, drama, music, art and PSHE. Students value the citizenship activities that form part of school life, including a Year 9 election day, a Year 7 'Get Global' scheme, the headteacher's homework challenge to imagine future school developments and visits from a magistrate and a prison officer. The school council has recently been re-established and enables students to experience democracy in action.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, eight 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 Year 13 students who completed courses 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	11	100	80	55	24	47.3	29.9
Biology	2	50	65	0	11	15.0	20.6
Business studies	2	100	76	0	16	30.0	26.2
Chemistry	3	67	73	0	14	13.3	24.1
Computing	12	50	67	17	11	19.2	21.4
Economics	2	100	74	50	20	50.0	26.4
English language and literature	6	100	83	17	18	33.3	28.7
English literature	12	83	86	25	19	28.3	30.2
French	1	0	78	0	19	0	27.6
Geography	3	67	74	0	20	13.3	26.5
History	4	100	81	0	20	25.0	28.6
Mathematics	2	50	62	50	17	25.0	22.1
Media studies	6	83	86	33	24	31.7	32.0
Physical education	1	100	73	0	11	40.0	23.1
Physics	6	67	69	0	14	18.3	22.7
Psychology	14	79	70	29	17	27.1	24.1
Religious studies	2	100	80	50	23	45.0	29.8
Sociology	13	69	72	31	18	26.2	25.4
Theatre studies	3	100	87	33	20	33.3	30.6

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	3	100	99	100	50	120.0	87.5
Biology	8	100	96	38	39	85.0	78.6
Business studies	11	100	99	27	37	76.4	80.1
Chemistry	11	100	98	36	49	80.0	84.9
Computing	4	100	96	75	25	95.0	69.5
Economics	1	100	99	0	52	80.0	88.3
English language and literature	6	100	99	50	36	80.0	80.9
English literature	5	100	100	40	47	84.0	86.5
French	3	100	99	33	52	73.3	87.6
Geography	5	100	99	20	45	72.0	84.0
History	13	100	99	23	45	73.8	84.6
Media studies	16	100	99	19	38	66.3	82.1
Mathematics	13	69	97	31	56	53.8	88.8
Other languages	2	100	97	100	65	120.0	93.8
Physical Education	11	100	98	18	31	70.9	75.2
Physics	8	100	97	25	45	77.5	81.7
Psychology	7	100	97	43	43	77.1	81.8
Religious studies	4	100	99	50	47	80.0	85.6
Sociology	8	100	98	50	44	90.0	83.6
Theatre studies	3	100	100	0	40	53.3	83.6
Business VCE	23	100	65	17	15	65.2	60.1
Leisure and recreation VCE	13	92	63	15	10	64.6	57.9

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English language and literature and French were inspected in detail but English literature, German and Spanish were sampled.

148. A-level results in **English literature** were average in 2002 and 2003, but dropped considerably in 2004, when students did less well than expected. In the AS-level examination, however, results were above average and students did better than expected. A Year 12 lesson was observed, in which teaching was good. The teacher effectively challenged students to analyse the themes in the play 'Translations'. Students worked well in groups and grew in confidence as they reported back to the class. The teacher used her command of the subject to encourage them to deepen their thinking.
149. A-level results in **Spanish** in 2004 were high, and students achieved as well as expected from their GCSE results. There were no entries for **German**. A Year 12 lesson was observed in each language and, in both lessons, teaching was very good. The lessons were very well planned and the topics were relevant and stimulating. Students' ability to use the foreign language is enhanced by good support from the foreign language assistants. Students do not use computers to their full potential, but do use the internet for research.

English language and literature

Provision in English language and literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Students are very well prepared for examinations.
- Teachers know the students well and teaching is appropriate to their individual needs.
- In some lessons, students are reluctant to take initiative and engage in discussion.

Commentary

150. A-level results in 2003 were average and remained similar in 2004. AS-level results were also average. Students did better than expected in relation to their GCSE results.
151. Current standards in Year 13 are average. Standards on entry to the course are below average and students achieve well. They get a very good grounding in the techniques of linguistic and literary analysis. They learn to compare stylistic features of texts and use technical vocabulary correctly. Higher-attaining students are perceptive in their understanding of language and use appropriate writing styles when, for example, writing a social worker's report on Humpty Dumpty or analysing symbolism and imagery in Angela Carter's short stories. Lower-attaining students write less detailed, more straightforward accounts and are sometimes let down by inappropriately informal language.
152. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers prepare students very thoroughly for examinations. They have very good subject knowledge, explain aspects thoroughly and ask questions that make students think. There are times when students are reluctant to join in discussion and simply want teachers to give them

information. In these circumstances, teachers are not sufficiently insistent that students think for themselves and engage actively. Work is carefully marked and assessed, with a clear indication given as to how it could be improved.

153. The subject is very well led and well managed. The head of department has very good systems for tracking students' progress and identifying underachievement. Students' strengths and weaknesses are well known to teachers and they receive individual support when necessary. The department is not complacent and teachers regularly review the courses that they provide to make sure that they are meeting students' needs. The monitoring of teaching through lesson observation is at an early stage of development. The last inspection report did not make many specific references to the sixth form. However, the good quality of teaching has been maintained, students are making better progress in lessons and standards have risen, all indicating good progress.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

154. Standards of literacy and spoken English in the sixth form are average. Students' reading skills are good enough to enable them to carry out appropriate research. They are also usually able to express their ideas clearly in discussion and write in appropriate styles. In law, for example, students make good progress in writing analytically and in discussing cases. They acquire the conventions of legal language well. In a history lesson that was observed, students gave high quality presentations on the Boer War. Students' writing skills could be further improved if teachers more often corrected inappropriate informal expressions, or gave them examples of good pieces of writing as models.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and standards are above average.
- Students benefit greatly from a good range of visits.
- Lessons are conducted entirely in French and, as a result, students are starting to use French as a normal means of communication.
- Teachers plan learning activities very well so that students become independent learners.
- Students do not use computers enough to prepare or present their work.

Commentary

155. A-level results were above average in 2002, but dipped to below average in 2003. The 2004 results improved and were similar to those in 2002. In relation to their GCSE results, students did better than expected in 2002, less well than expected in 2003 and as expected in 2004. There are signs of an improving trend, though numbers taking A-level in recent years have been small. In each of the last three years, the majority of students who have started the AS-level course have continued for a second year to take the A2 level.

156. Standards seen during the inspection are above average. The number of candidates has increased recently and more students are taking French in Year 12 than ever before. This highlights the good achievement made by students who embark on the course.
157. Teaching and learning are very good. All students have very positive attitudes and participate with enthusiasm and interest. Teachers plan lessons very well and make good use of resources. They have very good ideas for activities and use French to communicate with the students at all times. As a result, students are also starting to use French as their habitual means of communication with the teacher. The topics cover a range of contemporary issues and students make presentations to each other on themes such as marriage in modern society and the development of multi-cultural societies in the French-speaking world. Students use the internet for research, but rarely use ICT to present or word process their work, thereby missing out on a useful means of support.
158. Leadership and management are very good. The course is very well planned and resourced. It is supported by beneficial trips and links with French-speaking countries. The department co-ordinates the work of the different teachers well and students derive considerable benefit from the work of the foreign language assistant. The acting head of department provides a model of very successful teaching. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good in Year 13 and is responsible for an improvement in standards this term.
- Students' achievement is helped by their good attitudes to work.
- The wide range of abilities in Year 12 makes it difficult for the teacher to meet the needs of all students.
- Students do not make sufficient oral contributions in lessons.

Commentary

159. A-level results in 2003 were well below average. Students did less well than expected in relation to their GCSE results and less well than in their other subjects. The low results were due to severe staffing difficulties. In 2004, results improved and were similar to the 2003 national average, but students still did less well than expected. AS-level results in 2004 were low and many students did not achieve a grade. Eight students continued into Year 13.
160. Staffing is now more stable than in the last two years and current standards in Year 13 are average. They are rising as a result of good teaching and represent good achievement this term. Achievement overall is satisfactory, as the standard of these students at the start of their sixth form course was also average. Students understand

statistical ideas and can apply them to solve problems. In Year 12, most students sketch graphs satisfactorily. A small minority do not have the algebraic skills needed for an AS-level course and are making little progress. Other students show very good understanding and quickly learn new processes. Overall, standards in Year 12 are below average. Achievement is satisfactory as standards were below average at the start of the course.

161. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching is satisfactory in Year 12 and good in Year 13. In Year 13, the teaching meets the needs of the students well. In Year 12 it is difficult for the teaching to meet the needs of a much larger group with a wide range of attainment. Teachers have good subject expertise and plan lessons well. Students' attitudes are positive and this aids their learning. In the better lessons, students learn well because they are required to explain their understanding and their solutions to problems. Where lessons are less effective, teachers' questions do not demand this level of response. Resources are used well in some lessons. Teachers' explanations are made clearer by the use of a computerised whiteboard, though the illustration of some ideas, such as the limits of a function, needs further development.
162. Management is satisfactory. The monitoring of the subject's performance is at an early stage of development as a key member of staff is new to the work. A notable feature this term is students' involvement in assessing their own performance and setting their targets. This is helping to raise standards in Year 13. Leadership is good, providing a sense of purpose, high aspirations and a good role model for other staff and students. Teachers work hard. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory as there has been some improvement in both standards and teaching.

Mathematics across the curriculum

163. The use of mathematics in other subjects is satisfactory. There is no co-ordinated programme to develop students' numeracy skills, but teachers of each subject ensure that students learn the mathematics that they require for that subject. Students' skills are adequate for their courses. Numeracy is developed well in science and business studies but in physical education, the opportunities for students to learn and apply mathematical techniques have not been planned.

SCIENCE

The main focus was on biology, but chemistry and physics were also sampled.

164. A-Level results in **chemistry** were very high in 2002 and average in 2003. The 2004 results were well above those of 2003. Two thirds of students achieved grades A or B and their achievement in relation to their GCSE results was very good. One lesson was observed, in which teaching was satisfactory. Students were challenged to use their good knowledge of electronic structures in elements to explain patterns in the values for their ionisation energies. The latter part of the lesson was less successful because the teacher tried to move on before students had consolidated these concepts. The teacher recognised students' difficulty and adapted her plans accordingly.
165. Results in **physics** have been average for the last three years. Students' achievements in 2003 and 2004 were as expected for their abilities. A Year 13 lesson that was

observed was very good. Students demonstrated a very good understanding of features of the photoelectric effect. Well guided by the teacher, students experimentally derived a value for Planck's constant by shining light of different wavelengths onto a photoelectric cell. A strong feature of the teaching was the very effective use of analogy to help students grasp the underlying principles so that, by the end, all could explain the causes of the patterns in the data.

Biology

Provision in biology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results have been well above average in recent years.
- Teaching is very good, with a good balance of explanation and questioning.
- Good marking of students' work helps them to achieve their targets.
- The subject is led and managed well.
- ICT is not used enough to enhance learning because of a lack of resources.

Commentary

166. A-level results were well above average in 2002 and 2003. Students did much better than expected in relation to their GCSE results. The 2004 results show a further improvement, with over half gaining grades A and B. Twelve students took AS-level examinations in Year 12 in 2004; eight went on to A2 level, but of the remaining four, only two obtained pass grades.

167. Current standards in Year 13 are well above average and students' achievement is very good. Most students have a very good grasp of key principles and facts and acquire new knowledge quickly. They understand the mechanisms by which pigments in plant and animal cells are temporarily changed and some of the effects when they are exposed to light. Year 12 students have settled into their new course well. The number taking biology has risen substantially and they show enthusiasm for the subject. Most are achieving well, although the range of ability is wide. Through well-planned practical work, they learn techniques such as those for isolating DNA from onion cells.

168. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are experienced and well qualified and work together to link the different elements of the course. Their very good subject knowledge is evident in their clear explanations and precise use of scientific notation. New vocabulary is highlighted and its use modelled to help students assimilate it quickly. In the best teaching, a very good balance is struck between direct teaching of new principles and questioning or tasks to probe students' understanding. Sometimes, however, not enough emphasis is given to students' summarising their learning, for example, by annotating diagrams to complete an explanation. As a result, opportunities are lost to check students' understanding. Teachers sometimes use ICT very effectively to illustrate presentations of, for example, the cardiovascular and pulmonary changes that result from improved fitness. Overall, however, ICT is not used enough because of a lack of computer projectors and internet access. Teachers guide students' independent study well through interesting assignments such as

research into specific diseases. Students use texts, journals and the internet to do research and present their findings to the class. Students' progress is very regularly assessed. They know their targets and are helped by constructive comments on their work. Their understanding is also enhanced because they use the course assessment criteria to evaluate their own work.

169. The subject is led and managed well. Teaching is monitored and supported and students' progress towards their targets is closely tracked. Standards and achievement have improved since the last inspection. A current priority is to ensure that students of all abilities in Year 12 are adequately supported, especially the weaker students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and rising.
- Students' attitudes are positive: they work very hard and achieve well.
- Students learn with a good degree of independence.
- Students need more opportunity to discuss their work in groups.

Commentary

170. ICT is offered through two courses: A-level computing and a certificate of competence in ICT. A-level results in 2002 were average. In 2003 and 2004, results improved and were above average. Results in the AS-level examination were average in 2003 but dipped in 2004, when a significant minority of students failed. Students are yet to sit the examination for the certificate in competence.

171. For current students of computing in Year 13, standards are above average. This represents good achievement, as students started the year with average AS-level grades. All students have a good understanding of the advanced features of databases and spreadsheets. They can write programs to automate tasks. Their databases are thoroughly tested to make sure that they are stable. Students' understanding of programming and data structure is advanced. Their evaluations are not as detailed as other aspects of their work.

172. Standards on the AS-level computing course are average. Students are gaining a good grounding in the different ways electronic data is carried in computers. They started the course with below-average GCSE grades and are achieving well.

173. Standards on the ICT certificate course are below average. Students can word process a letter without mistakes and merge it with a mailing list. They use appropriate text styles and graphics in desktop publishing, but do not always use colours well for the text and background. Students' achievement is good, having started the course with basic ICT skills.

174. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this to focus learning on essential concepts. They are enthusiastic about the subject

and this inspires students' interest. Students are extremely positive towards their learning and work very hard, which aids their achievement. In practical lessons, they are encouraged to learn independently and use the teacher as a learning resource. However, lessons do not include enough time for students to clarify and modify their ideas through discussion.

175. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff are committed to improvement and take appropriate action to monitor standards. Assessment is good and provides students with valuable feedback on progress towards their targets. ICT has shown satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

176. The use of ICT in the learning of other subjects is satisfactory. Students' skills using computers are average. They use the internet well to do research and use computers competently in many subjects for word processing coursework. Many students use PowerPoint effectively when presenting their work to the rest of the class. Students would like better access to computers for private study.

HUMANITIES

Law was inspected in detail, but geography, history, psychology, religious studies and sociology were also sampled.

177. A-level results in **geography** were below average in 2003 and were lower still in 2004. Students have done less well than expected in relation to their GCSE results for the last three years. Two lessons were observed, both of which were satisfactory. Teachers had good knowledge of the subject and established constructive relationships. In the Year 13 lesson, however, students had little opportunity to be actively involved or take any responsibility for their learning. As a result, their interest was limited.
178. **History** results were below average in 2003 but improved in 2004, when students achieved as expected from their GCSE results. A Year 13 lesson was observed, in which teaching was very good. Standards were above average. Students made presentations on aspects of the Boer War on the basis of thorough research. The teacher's intellectual challenge deepened their knowledge and their awareness of parallels with present-day conflicts.
179. A-level results in **psychology** were average in 2003, but declined a little in 2004. In both years, students did as well as expected in relation to their GCSE results. A Year 13 lesson was observed, in which teaching was satisfactory. The teacher gave a clear exposition on the sleep cycle, including the brain wave patterns in the different stages of sleep. Students were interested in the subject and this was enhanced by good rapport with the teacher. However, much of the learning was passive, with few opportunities for students to explore their own questions and construct their own understanding.
180. **Religious studies** results were average in 2002 and 2003, but in 2004 they were lower and students achieved less well than expected. Two lessons were observed – a

very good lesson in Year 12 and a good lesson in Year 13. The Year 12 students were very responsive to the teacher's challenge in exploring the sources of self-knowledge. Year 13 students effectively understood the historical origin of the concept of a just war and were able to construct arguments from different positions. A minority of students, although orally competent, had difficulty in organising their written and research work.

181. A-level results in **sociology** were above average in 2003, but dropped to average in 2004 as a result of a staffing problem which has since been resolved. In discussion, Year 13 students showed a sound knowledge of sociological theories and were able to compare them. The course is well organised. Students are very positive about the course and the standard of their written work is average.

Law

Provision in law is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- The teacher is expert in the subject.
- Students work positively and achieve well.
- There is a limited range of visits and visitors to help students to relate theory to practice.

Commentary

182. No students were entered for A-level law in 2003. Three students took AS level in 2003 and all passed, one gaining a top grade. A-level results in 2004 were above the national average for 2003. Students did better than expected from their GCSE results, though girls did better than boys. AS-level results in 2004 were below the 2003 average, partly because many students' prior attainment was low, but also because some students had poor attitudes to work. Some students, however, achieved well.

183. In the current Year 13 – a small group of six students – standards are above average. They are achieving well as a result of good teaching and their own positive attitudes. Students work independently and think for themselves about legal principles. Most are keen to contribute to lessons. In a lesson on inchoate crimes, for example, students effectively discussed and analysed a number of simulated cases to develop their understanding. Year 12 students respond well to the opportunity to carry out research. Students know the rules of judicial precedent and are beginning to analyse cases effectively. Some of the weaker students have difficulty in analysing evidence and evaluating legal arguments, but receive good help in developing these skills.

184. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. The teacher has very good subject knowledge and lessons are planned very carefully using appropriate tasks and resources to engage and interest students. Students are provided with clear, informative notes and are also challenged to think for themselves and to learn independently. Expectations are high and full use is made of the time in lessons. Work

is carefully assessed and students are given helpful targets for improvement. Students' learning is enhanced by very good relationships and their enjoyment of the subject.

185. The subject is very well led and managed. Leadership is dedicated to achieving the highest possible standards and meeting the needs of the students. Management is thorough and efficient. More opportunities to meet people from the legal profession would broaden the curriculum and help students to relate theory to practice. Law was not reported in the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Product design was sampled.

186. A-level results in **product design** were very high in 2002, but below average in 2003. The 2004 results improved and were similar to those in 2002. In 2004, students did better than expected in relation to their GCSE results. A Year 12 lesson was observed. The nine students made very good progress in understanding the impact that manufacturing has on the environment and how this can be reduced. The teacher used a wide range of teaching methods to engage students actively and challenge them to think for themselves.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design, media studies, music, photography and theatre studies were sampled.

187. Results in **art and design** have been well above average for the last two years, though numbers have been small. Students have done better than expected in relation to their GCSE results. One lesson was seen which was good. Students were highly motivated and made good progress in their practical work from the very skilled interaction and challenge of the teacher. Standards reached by Year 13 students were well above average.
188. A-level results in **media studies** were well below average in 2003. They improved significantly in 2004 and were well above the 2003 national average. In 2004, students did better than expected from their GCSE results. A Year 13 lesson was observed in which teaching was good. Students worked individually on their practical assignment, which was to research, create and evaluate a media product. One student's assignment – a local newspaper – was of a very high standard, with very thorough research and high quality production using computer technology. Most students made good progress, but a minority needed a lot of support to meet their deadlines. Standards were average overall and the teacher provided high expectations and close individual guidance.
189. **Photography** is a new A-level course, introduced in response to students' interest. One lesson was seen which was good. Students were very enthusiastic and made good progress in their understanding of digital photography and the manipulation of images on a computer. In response to knowledgeable teaching, they developed their creative ideas and their ability to work independently.
190. **Theatre studies** results were below average in 2003 and similar in 2004. Students did less well than expected. A Year 13 lesson was observed in which teaching was good. Students discussed aspects of staging the play 'Our Country's Good'. They learnt well because the teacher's expertise in the subject enabled him to explain clearly and challenge students to think. Students clearly understood the criteria needed for them to attain a high grade.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education was inspected in detail, but leisure and recreation was sampled.

191. AVCE results in **leisure and recreation** were average in 2003; no students entered in 2004. There is a small group in Year 12. One lesson was seen, in which teaching was good. Standards were average for this stage of the course. Students were updating their CVs and exploring potential job opportunities in the field. They used ICT confidently, but remained dependent on the teacher. Teaching was knowledgeable and expert, contributing well to students' motivation and confidence.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Many students participate in the good enrichment programme.
- Good teaching and students' positive attitudes result in good achievement.
- There is a limited range of accredited courses on offer, particularly in vocational areas.
- The majority of students have limited independent study skills.

Commentary

192. A-level results in 2003 were average and students did as well as in their other subjects. In 2004, the results remained similar, but students did less well than in their other subjects.
193. Current standards on the AS and A-level courses are average and students achieve well. In the AS-level course, a significant minority of students are below average, though they are achieving well relative to their ability. There are a few who find the course very difficult, though they enjoy it and work hard. Higher-attaining students in both courses have a good knowledge of the theory, with strengths in psychology and anatomy. They can explain their knowledge clearly and add depth to their understanding by doing their own research. Average and lower-attaining students have poorer study skills. Students who have not taken the GCSE in physical education would benefit from an introductory unit. Students do not have enough regular opportunities to use ICT and data analysis in their work.
194. Many sixth form students take part in the programme of recreational sport and often reach high standards in their chosen activities. Students have adept canoeing skills and a high sense of responsibility towards others' safety. Football teams perform skilfully, with good support from other students. Students regularly help in younger students' lessons and clubs. They also visit local primary schools to help organise sport. The Bronze Medallion life-saving course is ably taught by a student.
195. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and, though relatively inexperienced, are developing good teaching methods to engage students of all abilities. They use questions well to help students consolidate their knowledge, but do not always emphasise sufficiently the use of technical language. Students are set targets to improve their work, but do not always have enough specific guidance to know how to attain them. Students' progress is monitored well, though this is done differently by each teacher. Teaching and officiating in the recreational programme are of a high standard. There is a commendable mutual respect between students and teachers that has developed over several years.
196. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There has been good improvement since the last inspection with the addition of the A-level course. However, there is not enough monitoring and support for teaching to achieve consistency in, for example, the use of assessment. The range of accredited vocational courses is less than is normally found in a specialist sports college.

BUSINESS

The vocational courses in business studies were inspected in detail and the GCE A-level course was sampled.

197. A-level results in **business studies** were average in 2002 and 2003, but improved in 2004 and were well above the 2003 national average. In 2003, students did as well as expected from their GCSE results, but in 2004 their progress was better than expected. Two lessons were observed. In a Year 13 lesson, students made very good progress in constructing a critical path analysis. Their very good learning was due to

the teacher's high expectations, clear communication and good attention to the needs of all students. Teaching and learning in a Year 12 lesson were good. Students responded well to the teacher's clear explanation and challenge and developed a good understanding of a complex method of analysing product life cycles.

Business studies AVCE and GNVQ

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well and reach above average standards.
- Teaching and learning are very good, enabling students to reach their full potential.
- Students respond very maturely: they value their learning and self-development.
- The department provides a very good range of courses.
- Data on students' targets and progress are not available for the GNVQ groups.

Commentary

198. Results in the AVCE examination were average in 2002 and 2003. Results improved in 2004 and were above the 2003 national average. Students did better than expected in relation to their GCSE results in 2003 and 2004. In the GNVQ Intermediate course, results in 2004 were about average: all but one student passed and two-fifths gained merit grades. Progress in relation to their GCSE performance was good.

199. For current students, standards in the GNVQ Intermediate course are above average. Many students start the course with below-average GCSE results and they achieve very well, maturing both intellectually and socially during the year. Many of the current class are likely to achieve merit grades. The course is a very good transition route into higher-level studies: the department has a strong record of GNVQ students progressing into both vocational and academic level 3 courses in business studies.

200. On the AVCE course, current standards in Year 13 are average and are likely to improve by the end of the year. Students are very determined and are well motivated by the very good assessment and feedback on their work. This gives students very clear guidance on how to reach higher grades and demonstrates high expectations. Achievement is very good for these students, who develop good social skills in addition to their academic results. Many students on the AVCE courses have come through the GNVQ route. Current standards in Year 12 are below average, but these students are already achieving well. Not all plan to complete the 12-unit double award course. Some are already in their second year in the sixth form and are planning to go on to higher education. All have very positive attitudes and work well together, enjoying harmonious, mature relationships with their teachers.

201. Teaching and learning are very good. The teachers have between them a very good balance of expertise and use this very effectively in teaching different units. They collaborate very closely and, as a result, students see the links between different parts of the course. A wide range of teaching methods is used that enables students to develop their ability to learn independently. Students make good use of ICT, number and communication skills in their presentations, though some would benefit from more

reinforcement of these key skills elsewhere in the curriculum. Classes are generally small and tutorial sessions are used very effectively in many lessons to stretch all individuals. Students are highly self-motivated because they enjoy learning, and produce much work outside lessons.

202. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department is a good role model for students and staff and is well supported by a team of committed teachers who share high aspirations for their students. Staff do not have enough assessment data on GNVQ students to set targets and track their progress, which is a concern as it compromises the parity of esteem between the courses. Resources are used effectively, including external sources such as visiting speakers, to ensure that the work is relevant and embedded in real business practice. Teaching and achievement were good in the last inspection and since then there has been further good improvement.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

203. All sixth form students follow a comprehensive programme of **general education**. Year 12 students have fortnightly lectures from outside speakers that include representatives of local faith communities and speakers on current affairs such as poverty and fair trade. Religious education is also covered through three one-day conferences that are planned to take place over the two years of the sixth form. All Year 12 students take part in a fortnightly enrichment programme that includes a choice of examination courses, such as GCSE psychology, AS-level general studies or AS-level critical thinking, and general courses, such as cooking. The school also offers the Advanced Extension Award in critical thinking. Sixth form students have careers lessons and, on one afternoon per week, there is a recreational afternoon of sports activities.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

