

INSPECTION REPORT

THE CANTERBURY HIGH SCHOOL

Canterbury

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118893

Headteacher: Keith Hargrave

Lead inspector: Romy Markham

Dates of inspection: 8 - 12 November 2004

Inspection number: 268956

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Modern Non-Selective
School category: Foundation
Age range of pupils: 11 to 19
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1086

School address: Knight Avenue
Canterbury
Kent
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Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of Mrs D Wells
governors:

Date of previous 26 April 1999
inspection:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Canterbury High School is an average sized secondary modern school for boys and girls in Canterbury. Numbers have increased over the last five years and the school is oversubscribed. The school is a specialist sports college and it also selects fifteen percent of each year group on their interest in music. The school draws from an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The school reports that almost 20 per cent of the school population are known to external agencies including social services, counselling and medical support. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. About five per cent of pupils are from other ethnic groups including African, Asian and European. Currently there are 18 pupils in the early stages of learning English. There are no Traveller children but there are four pupils from refugee families. More pupils than usual enter or leave the school during the year. Over the last five years the school has changed 20 per cent of its population.

Standards on entry to the school are well below average and literacy levels are particularly low. There are many more pupils with special educational needs than in other schools, with moderate learning, social and emotional and some specific learning problems. The school has a local authority unit for 30 pupils with speech and language difficulties. The proportion of pupils with formal Statements of Special Educational Needs is well above average. In addition to specialist sports college status, the school organises a sports network and has developed an élite sports academy. There is community use of facilities and a range of outreach programmes. The school has made considerable investment in support staff as part of workforce remodelling. Recent awards include Healthy Schools, Investors in People, the DfES Achievement Award and Leading Edge School 2004. The headteacher is also executive headteacher of a school in challenging circumstances some twenty miles away.

The sixth form has 164 students on roll and is smaller than typical sixth forms. The school offers courses to A-level, GCSE and foundation levels, some in conjunction with a local grammar school. Most pupils are of White British origin, as the main school. Standards on entry are below average for sixth forms. About half of each Year 11 group stay to study in the sixth form. Last year about a third of the Year 13 students continued into higher education, a third into further education and the remaining third into employment.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1387	R Markham	Lead inspector	
1165	P Dannheisser	Lay inspector	
22958	T Bailless	Team inspector	English; English as an additional language
22691	R Woodhouse	Team inspector	Mathematics
20837	L Powell	Team inspector	Science
2971	K Hooper	Team inspector	Design and technology; health and social care
28106	M Majid	Team inspector	Information and communication technology; citizenship
31690	B Smith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
22695	R Cardinal	Team inspector	Business education
30114	A Kenward	Team inspector	History
18638	C Shaw	Team inspector	Art and design; information and communication technology in the sixth form.
30072	J Skivington	Team inspector	Music; religious education; sociology
2141	J Oxley	Team inspector	Physical education
11300	B Smith	Team inspector	Geography; special educational needs
22629	J Clemence	Team inspector	Speech and language provision

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is very good. The school has many excellent features and key strengths in meeting the needs of all pupils through very good teaching and learning. Pupils do much better than would be expected from their standards at entry to the school. The school is very well led at all levels and gives very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Excellent leadership by the headteacher ensures that school is at the forefront of educational initiatives in teaching and learning so that pupils achieve very well.
- Provision is creative, innovative and based on the principle that every pupil can succeed in life. The range of academic and vocational subjects in Years 10 and 11 is excellent.
- The ethos for learning is outstanding, reflecting a core belief in positive relationships and a respect for each other and for learning.
- The sports college provision and methodology affect the school in promoting a healthy lifestyle, teamwork and strategies to improve personal performance and achievement.
- Strategies to support, monitor and guide pupils are outstanding; the schools' organisation and mentoring system ensures that each pupil is well known, valued and able to learn very well.
- The school is a true learning organisation at all levels; provision for staff and teacher training and development is excellent.
- The school adds considerable value to pupils' education and results in examinations are improving faster than in most other schools. However, examination success is affected by the pupils' weak literacy skills.
- Pupils do not have the opportunities to use information and communications technology (ICT) across the curriculum as consistently as they should.

The school has made very good improvements since the last report. Standards have improved and achievement is better, despite the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs. All issues from the last report have been tackled vigorously. The sports college provision is playing a key role in improving achievement and in promoting pupils' personal development. The school was designated a Leading Edge School in 2004, working with other schools to raise standards of teaching and learning.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Pupils achieve very well by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. They make very good gains in their learning from their standards on entry, which are well below average. Almost half of the pupils have some form of special educational need. In the national tests for pupils in Year 9 in 2003, results were well below the average for all schools nationally but much better than those of similar schools, based on pupils' prior attainment. General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) results were below average in 2003 but again, much better than those of similar schools. Results in 2004 continued this upward trend of improvement. National value added indicators from Year 6 to Year 11 in 2004 show that the school is in the top two per cent nationally.

Standards seen during the inspection were below average in Years 7 to 9 but broadly average in Years 10 and 11 and improving in response to recent changes in the curriculum. Standards of work seen were better than those in recent examination results because class work is carefully structured and pupils are helped with literacy skills. Standards in Year 11 were average in all subjects except mathematics and science, which remain below average, and in physical education where standards were above average. Standards seen in the sixth form overall were below the average for all sixth forms nationally; this reflects students' standards on entry. Recent improvements in standards in Years 10 and 11 have not yet moved through to the sixth form. Literacy and numeracy skills are below average. The pupils' skills in using ICT are broadly average, but they do not always have the opportunities to use these skills across the curriculum.

The pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Attitudes to work and school are very good. Relationships and racial harmony are very good. Attendance is satisfactory. The impact of the sports college provision is seen in pupils' developing self-confidence and self-esteem.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education is very good. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school, as is assessment. The curriculum is very good overall and meets the varying needs of pupils very well indeed. Provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties is excellent. There are effective systems of care and welfare, and learning is enhanced by the excellent links with other schools and colleges. Support and guidance for pupils are outstanding; the mentoring system and monitoring of progress are major factors in improving standards and achievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and is very well supported by other senior staff. Management at all levels is very good. Governance is good although not all statutory requirements are met. Pupils do not have the opportunity for collective worship each day, but this is not affecting pupils' personal development. The limited time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 means that the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus are not met in full, although this also does not impact on pupils' achievement, which is very good. Provision for ICT is insufficient for pupils to have access regularly across the curriculum and this is a barrier to the pace of learning using ICT in some subjects.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are positive about the work of the school. They value what the school provides for their children, both academically and through the range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities on offer. Almost all of those parents answering the pre-inspection survey said that their children like the school and that it encourages them to become mature and independent. A significant minority disagreed or did not know whether the school finds out about parents' views and acts on them. Inspectors found that the school is responding positively to parental views. Pupils like this school and they settle in easily from their primary schools. They say what they describe as bullying is always well handled by staff and does not persist.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that there is a consistent whole-school focus on extended literacy skills so that pupils can show their knowledge effectively in examinations
- Improve provision for ICT and monitor its use so that the very good practice in some areas is developed in all departments.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Monitor the consistency of collective worship through 'thought for the day' and the time allocation for religious education in Years 10 and 11.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE CANTERBURY HIGH SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

Provision is very good, as are teaching and learning. Provision is cost effective; students do much better than expected from their standards on entry. Students achieve very well, particularly in vocational subjects, and are very well prepared for further or higher education or employment. The sixth form is very well led.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school provides a wide range of accredited courses, from basic skills to A-level, to meet the varying needs of students.
- Teachers, mentors and external agencies provide excellent support, guidance and monitoring.
- There are excellent links with other schools, colleges and employers.

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 are achieving well in response to good teaching.
Mathematics	There are no AS/A level courses at present. Provision is good in the GCSE mathematics course; teaching is good and students achieve well.
Science	Very good in vocational science. Teaching is very good and students reach average standards by the end of the course. Provision in GCSE science courses was sampled; teaching and learning were very good.
Information and communication technology	Very good in A-Level ICT. Students achieve very well and standards are average.
Humanities	Very good in sociology. Students achieve very well in response to very good teaching and assessment of their work. A Year 12 AS-level government and politics lesson was sampled. The quality of teaching was good.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	This area was not inspected.
Visual and performing arts and media	Work was sampled in drama . Teaching was very good . Standards in improvised work to create physical theatre were above average. Work was sampled in art , where teaching was very good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in physical education is excellent . Teaching is very good, facilities are excellent and students have very positive attitudes to their work. Standards are above average. Work was sampled in leisure and recreation . Teaching and learning were very good as students worked on a real world problem of customer service.

Business	Very good in business studies. Learning and achievement are very good because teaching methods are very well matched to the needs of students.
Health and social care	Provision in health and social care is satisfactory . The course provides learning opportunities for students with very low prior attainment. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
General education	This area was not inspected.

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

Provision is excellent. Regular one-to-one meetings with learning mentors provide high quality support. Mentors know the students and monitor their progress very well. There are very positive approaches to opportunities available in school and elsewhere and very good use is made of available external support. Small group sizes in the sixth form mean that students are very well known to their teachers, who provide an additional level of support and guidance.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership is very good. The head of sixth form has a clear vision for the breadth and quality of provision. There is a strong focus on enabling students to achieve. Management is good. Key strengths are in the flexibility of provision with partner providers and in monitoring teaching and learning.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Almost without exception the students enjoy life in the sixth form. They all say that the school is well run and consider that teaching is challenging and demanding. They like the courses available, including the shared provision. They agree that staff are all expert in their fields. Almost all said that their teachers are accessible and helpful over their work. They would like to have a common room for relaxation and socialising, in addition to the existing study centre.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is very good in all years. Standards are below average overall and in Years 7 to 9 but are average in Years 10 and 11. Pupils with special educational needs, including those with speech and language problems, are very well supported and they achieve very well throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is very good in GCSE courses in French, ICT, humanities, design and technology, art and design and physical education.
- GCSE examination results are much better than those of similar schools.
- Weaknesses in language and literacy skills prevent pupils from showing their knowledge to best effect in tests and examinations.

Commentary

1. In the national tests for pupils in Year 9 in 2003, results were well below the average for all schools nationally. Over the last three years, results have been well below average overall and for each of English, mathematics and science. The trend of improvement is below the national trend but value added is broadly average. However, results and value added are well above those of similar schools, based on pupils' prior attainment. In 2003, the results matched the targets set in English and science but not in mathematics. Results in 2004 showed considerable improvement but national comparisons are not yet available.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.0 (31.4)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	30.1 (30.1)	35.4 (34.7)
science	29.6 (29.3)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 183 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. In GCSE examinations in 2003, results were well below national figures for five or more passes at grades A*-C. Results did, however, match the targets set for the school. Over three years, results are broadly in line with the national trend of improvement. Girls do better than the boys; the difference is broadly similar to that found nationally. Girls did better in drama, English, humanities and music while the boys did better in mathematics and physical education than in their other subjects. Results show that value added is well above average from the pupils' performance at the end of Year 9. Results in 2004 continued this upward trend of improvement.

National value added indicators from Year 6 to Year 11 in 2004 show that the school is in the top two per cent 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	33 (29)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	86 (86)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	94 (92)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	29 (26.9)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 184 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. In work seen during the inspection, standards overall were below average in Years 7 to 9 and showed good improvement from standards on entry. Although standards were below average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, they were broadly average in art and design, design and technology, music, religious education and physical education. Standards in Years 10 and 11 were average overall and in most subjects, including English and French. Standards were above average in physical education and this reflects the very good teaching and learning in this subject. Standards in mathematics and science were below average, but still an improvement overall.
4. Pupils achieve very well during their time in school. They make considerable improvements from their standards in the national tests in English, mathematics and science taken in Year 6. Achievement is good throughout the school in English, mathematics, science and music and very good in French, ICT, religious education, design and technology, art and design, physical education and citizenship.
5. Pupils' language and literacy skills are below average and this is a barrier to higher standards in tests and examinations. Pupils listen well to their teachers and to each other and they discuss issues effectively in informal groups. However, there are weaknesses in reading skills and the technical accuracy of written work. Spelling is a problem for the majority of pupils. Numeracy skills are also below average. Pupils need considerable support in using mathematical information, for example in the solving of formulae and in the analysis of data in using graphs. Pupils' competence in using ICT is below average in Years 7 to 9 but improves to average in Years 10 and 11.
6. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers. A combination of work planned to meet their needs, clear identification and good support by teaching assistants leads to very good achievement. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well in art and design, design and technology, physical education, religious education and geography. Pupils' progress and success are carefully tracked. In the most recent examinations all pupils with a formal Statement of Special Educational Needs reached the targets set for them.

Sixth form

7. In the sixth form, A-level results in 2003 were well below those of all schools nationally. Entry numbers, however, were very low and this means that the figures are

not statistically secure. There was, however, a noticeable gender difference. Female candidates did much better than male candidates; the gap is twice that found nationally but reflects their standards at GCSE. Results in vocational courses were better than those in A-level and AS-level.

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	63.4 (63.6)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	5.1 (5.8)	32.6 (25.3)
Average point score per pupil	127.3 (132.0)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 33 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

8. Standards seen during the inspection were below average overall in the subjects inspected in detail. However, standards varied considerably between subjects; standards were above average in physical education and business studies, but they were broadly average in science and ICT and were below average in English, mathematics and sociology. Standards in health and social care were well below average. Standards tend to reflect the prior attainment of students; most are achieving very well in response to good and very good teaching. Achievement was very good in science, sociology, physical education, business education and ICT; it was good in English. In mathematics, achievement was satisfactory in the course preparing students to re-sit GCSE examinations. In health and social care, achievement was satisfactory for a very small group of students with low prior attainment.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attitudes and behaviour are very good, as is pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Relationships and racial harmony are very good. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Behaviour is very good and pupils relate well to one another.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to all aspects of school life.
- Pupils are confident that the school deals very effectively with any problems they may experience.
- Pupils' personal development is promoted by carefully planned opportunities in lessons and in daily routines.

Commentary

9. Pupils behave very well in lessons and relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and their teachers and other adults are very good. This was also the case at the time of the previous inspection. Occasionally some individuals, especially in younger classes or where there is very inexperienced teaching, show boisterous behaviour and are easily distracted. However, the support structures within the school ensure that these pupils' needs are recognised and do not interfere with other pupils' learning. As pupils mature, their attitudes and behaviour show very good improvement. Pupils are respectful and helpful to staff, their peers and visitors. Pupils are lively but friendly and helpful as they move between classrooms.

10. The impact of sports college status has had a positive effect in promoting pupils' personal development, particularly in developing pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. This contributes to their very good behaviour and relationships.
11. Pupils are willing to take on responsibilities, for example, in the school council. Many pupils are involved in the wide range of clubs that stimulate individuals to take decisions and make their own mark. Pupils are involved in organising activities. For example, a bring-and-buy sale raised money for a charity. In addition, older students offer peer mentoring to younger pupils.
12. Pupils with special educational needs demonstrate very positive attitudes to the support they receive and this was evident in the excitement of a Year 7 boy in literacy support, responding to his success in identifying vowels. It is also evident in the way pupils work hard and are fully involved in all activities. Relationships are good, both in mainstream and withdrawal lessons.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2003-2004 (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.0	School data	0.8
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

13. Attendance is satisfactory. There has been a steady improvement in the figures. In part this is due to the very good procedures for monitoring attendance through electronic systems. These provide a quick and efficient means of checking attendance for every lesson. Rewards are given for excellent attendance. Despite occasional transport difficulties in the area, punctuality is good. This is because pupils are keen to arrive in time. Pupils do not leave school during the day without special permission and so resume class promptly after their lunch break.
14. In almost all lessons, pupils are keen to learn. There is evidence that there has been a recent fall in the number of exclusions. This is a response to the well thought out and effective strategies in support of good behaviour. The school still excludes several pupils for limited periods, and this appears to have a beneficial effect on the overall behaviour.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – any other white background
Mixed –white and black African
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
Black – or black British – African

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1011	132	8
9	0	0
1	0	0
3	0	0
2	2	1

Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	11	5	0
Total	1038	139	9

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

15. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good as a result of the provision in a range of subjects, the mentoring system and the high expectations of staff. It is school policy that all schemes of work and lesson plans highlight opportunities for the development of these areas. The first lesson for all pupils each day begins with the 'thought for the day', which is also written in pupils' planners and is planned to fulfil the requirement for a daily act of collective worship as well as to start the day with a common focus. The thoughts come from a range of sources and during the week of the inspection all the quotes were from Shakespeare. Where this is well delivered, teachers discuss the statement and pupils are given opportunities to express their own interpretations and to reflect upon what it might mean for them. However this does not happen consistently and there were examples seen when pupils were not given these opportunities; this means that the legal requirements for collective worship are not met fully. Year assemblies also provide opportunities for spiritual development and the focus during the inspection week was on remembrance. It is also evident in curriculum areas, for example in religious education, where they take part on empathetic writing and in music and dance, which generate genuine emotional responses. The mentoring system also provides opportunity for reflection and for pupils to develop respect for themselves and others. Overall, pupils' spiritual development has improved since the last inspection and is now very good.
16. Pupils' very good social development is reflected both in their attitudes and behaviour around the school and in the way they are able to learn effectively in groups and pairs. They also take part in a wide range of out-of-school activities and benefit from the input of many and varied outside speakers such as the police, theatre groups and visiting artists. Environmental issues are also a feature of pupils' learning in many subjects. The citizenship and personal and social education programme gives very good emphasis to pupils' understanding of right and wrong as well as a range of other issues, such as truancy and drugs and alcohol awareness. It also has modules that support pupils' preparation for living in a multi-cultural society. This is reinforced in subjects; for example in design and technology where pupils design a Mexican restaurant and in religious education where pupils study different religions and cultures. Very good cross-curricular links are made to reinforce pupils' learning so that overall their cultural development is very good. For example, in Year 9 pupils study Hinduism at the same time as they study Indian music and in Year 8, pupils study the Diary of Ann Frank in history at the same time as the Passover.

Sixth form

17. Attitudes and behaviour are very good in the sixth form. There are good relationships between students and teachers, based on trust and mutual respect. Students conduct themselves maturely and sensibly and present good role models to others younger than themselves.

18. Students have very positive attitudes to the school and an increasing number opt to continue their studies in the sixth form. There is an increasing range of subjects at various and appropriate levels and good consortium arrangements with other course providers. This has contributed to the excellent ethos.
19. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good because provision is planned carefully in the curriculum and in the ethos of the school, as in the main school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education is very good, with excellent features in several areas. Very effective teaching enables pupils to achieve very well. The school provides education of equal quality to all of its pupils and excellent support and guidance prepare them very well for life in modern society. The links with parents are good, those with the community very good, and those with other schools and colleges are excellent.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good overall; teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Assessment is very good overall and in the main school, and good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subject, and lessons are well prepared.
- Lessons include a good variety of activities and clear goals for learning.
- Departments work well as teams; teaching and learning are enhanced by the well-organised and knowledgeable work of teaching assistants.
- Greater emphasis is needed in promoting literacy and ICT skills in all subjects and numeracy skills in some areas.
- Assessment is systematic and comprehensive and ensures that pupils' progress is tracked carefully and targets reviewed and revised appropriately.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 144 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
10 (7%)	54 (38%)	49 (34%)	29 (20%)	2 (1%)	0	0

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

20. Teaching is very good, as seen in lessons during the inspection, in the pupils' work and from the results in tests and examinations. Very good teaching was seen in all years and in most subjects inspected in detail, but teaching was more consistently very good in Years 10 and 11. Very good teaching leads to very good learning and achievement. The school has a significant proportion of newly qualified and trainee teachers but in lessons seen many were already teaching very well. Teaching was very good in all years in French, ICT, religious education, design and technology, art and design, physical education and citizenship. Pupils respond very well to this very good teaching; they work hard individually and together and take pride in their learning. In the very small number of lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory, expectations were too low and relationships were not productive, leading to too much time being spent on managing pupils' behaviour.
21. The key strengths of teaching are the way in which teachers know their subject very well so that they can describe and explain using a range of examples. They devise interesting activities to gain pupils' attention, for example in the regular use of short 'starter' activities that get pupils focused on topics. Lessons start with a clear explanation of learning goals, and frequently end with a review session that reinforces learning. Teachers are skilled in posing challenging questions, to get pupils thinking about problems and solutions; this is equally effective in widely differing subjects such as mathematics, design and technology and in religious education. Teachers in English, design and technology, art and design, business education, music and physical education use ICT to enhance teaching and learning but this was not seen in other subjects. The school has recently changed from weekly homework to more long term 'learning practice'. Initial comments from pupils indicate that this is having a positive effect on pupils' independent learning skills.
22. Most departments include strategies for teaching writing skills in lesson planning but a greater emphasis is needed in developing reading skills and the technical accuracy of written work.

There is some very good practice in teaching numeracy, for example in physical education where soccer lessons are punctuated by short numeracy tasks, but teachers do not consistently promote numeracy or the use of ICT in teaching and learning in all subjects.

23. Teaching meets the different learning needs of pupils very well. Departments provide a range of materials and resources for pupils of differing abilities and teaching assistants provide very good support in lessons. Teaching is very good for pupils with special educational needs. Lessons are carefully planned and taught, for example the Year 8 geography lesson in which writing skills were boosted by use of appropriate writing frames. Where necessary, teaching takes place in small withdrawal groups. These are equally well planned and taught and often using the same materials as in mainstream classes. In Year 9 withdrawal groups for literacy support, the use of ICT helps pupils' writing skills. Inspectors saw excellent teaching of pupils with speech and language difficulties. The teaching was lively, and set high expectations for pupils. The activities were challenging, and teachers used a wide range of strategies to maximise the pupils' learning. Pupils were helped to sustain concentration through physical activities at intervals throughout the lesson, thus helping their brains to function more efficiently.
24. Assessment is very good. All aspects of the pupils' work are assessed thoroughly in each subject of the National Curriculum and also in religious education, work-related learning and citizenship. It is a natural part of teaching and learning. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and consistently. Grades and comments leave pupils in no doubt about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Teachers plan lessons to set challenges for all pupils based on the ongoing assessments and the very good information on pupils with special educational needs and gifted or talented pupils. This information is also used to brief teaching assistants who support pupils in class.
25. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 help devise their own targets, usually for each topic but sometimes for each lesson. Pupils can always quote their most recent National Curriculum level. They also say that all subject teachers set challenging work that is not too easy or too hard. In Years 10 and 11, teachers carefully explain the examination marking criteria and this enables pupils to measure their own progress against their target grades. Coupled with clear deadlines, this is a very positive spur to raising achievement.
26. The school collects data about standards regularly and uses this very well to track pupils' individual progress. Each mentor can then use this information to support and guide the pupils. This process also facilitates monitoring the overall picture of improvement in each curriculum area and illustrates trends. This valuable information is shared in departments and each faculty leader then provides an account of trends and plans for future development. The most effective department in this respect is physical education, which has devised comprehensive solutions using ICT. Other departments are not always aware of the national guidelines and the 'online' support for this process.
27. The initial identification and assessment of pupils with special educational needs is systematic and thorough. It is based on the very efficient transfer of information from primary schools and additional testing of reading and spelling skills on entry. Teachers compile very detailed academic records for each pupil. All information on pupils' attainment is available to teachers, as are the comprehensive targets set for each

pupil. Individual education plans provide clear guidance on how to achieve targets and the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress are regular and allow careful tracking of individual achievement. Assessment information combines department, subject and mentoring data and records review and test results to provide up-to-date evaluations.

Sixth form

28. Teaching is very good in the sixth form. In the subjects inspected in detail, teaching was very good in science, ICT, sociology, physical education and business education. Teaching was good in English and mathematics and satisfactory in health and social care. Very good teaching was also seen in other subjects that were sampled. Teaching in the sixth form shares the very good features seen in the main school, particularly lesson planning and high expectations, and these contribute to the very good learning and achievement. There are good relationships and a productive working environment. Teaching in business education promotes research skills and independent learning, but this was not a common feature; in mathematics and English there was often too much teacher talk and few opportunities for independent learning.
29. Assessment is good in the sixth form. Teachers assess students' work thoroughly and use the information to keep them up to date on their progress. They plan lessons well and are able to set appropriate targets and deadlines. Most students have a good idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do to achieve their targets. Teachers mark and assess the students' work consistently and accurately. In science and in health and social care these processes are not thorough enough and the teachers rely too much on verbal advice in lessons. Most teachers plan lessons to set challenges for all students based on the ongoing assessments. In the best lessons, teachers use information about students with special needs, or the gifted or talented, to enhance this process.
30. In most subjects, teachers carefully explain the examination marking criteria and this enables students to measure their own progress against their target grades. Sixth form teachers give very careful guidance on deadlines and this provides an important impetus to the students. It also helps them to learn independent study skills and good working habits.

The curriculum

Curriculum provision is very good overall and it meets pupils' needs very well. The curriculum is good in Years 7 to 9, excellent in Years 10 and 11 and very good in the sixth form. Provision in the speech and language unit is excellent. Enrichment activities are very good, and extra-curricular provision is excellent. Students and pupils are given excellent preparation for the next stages in their education or employment. Accommodation is very good and resources for learning are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is excellent equality of access and opportunity for all pupils.
- There is an excellent range of academic and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11.
- There are excellent opportunities for learning outside the school day, including both sport and general interest activities.
- Sixth form provision is very strong and is well devised to meet the needs of students.

- There is limited access to ICT in some departments, so this resource is not used to best effect in teaching and learning.

Commentary

31. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is very good; it is broad and balanced and includes all the required subjects. Provision includes enhancement and enrichment opportunities in the school day, for example, for additional sport or expressive arts. Provision is flexible and includes short-term booster or support groups for pupils with particular needs, such as the most able or those with learning difficulties.
32. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is excellent. Innovations in the last two years have developed a wide range of academic and vocational provision. Each pupil follows at least one vocational course and all follow a core programme of English, mathematics, science, ICT, humanities, physical education and citizenship. The school provides a range of accreditation opportunities so that all pupils can succeed to their potential. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations and their achievements have improved in response to this curriculum provision. The sports college status has enabled the school to offer 'Fastrack' courses in physical education, encouraging pupils to achieve more and enter higher education.
33. Personal, social and health education is taught through other subjects of the curriculum. Provision is well planned. For example, English covers aspects of relationship and the science curriculum covers aspects of sex education. Other subjects such as religious education, modern foreign languages and humanities are also involved. There is a newly appointed school-based youth worker who will be delivering a drugs education programme to the whole school. Together with the school nurse and the physical education department, projects include an after-school youth club and healthy eating.
34. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The identification and assessment of pupils with learning difficulties are thorough and supported by regular testing and review. The needs of most pupils are known and provided for before entry. Liaison with primary schools starts in Year 5 with attendance at annual reviews and is very constructive, culminating in a 'handover' day when schools gather to pass on relevant documentation. Reading and spelling tests enable staff to identify priorities and allocate pupils to a range of support groups or to arrange in-class support. All teachers are provided with good information on individual pupils' needs, for example through individual education plans or target sheets. Regular review of this strand of support helps to ensure very good provision for pupils with a wide range of needs.
35. Although there is a large number of withdrawal groups, every effort is made to avoid disrupting mainstream lessons. Teaching assistants provide very good quality support in lessons. They are well trained; they take a full part in lesson planning and maintain very good records of pupils' progress. As a result, pupils with special educational needs achieve very well.

36. There are very few pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). About 18 are at an early stage of speaking English, including some who have arrived in the country in the past few weeks. The school supports them very well. The work is ably supervised by a visiting teacher from the local education authority, who acts as EAL co-ordinator for the school.
37. Provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties is excellent. The curriculum is flexible and relevant to pupils' wide-ranging individual needs; there is exemplary inclusion of pupils throughout the school. The most important priorities are identified for pupils that will enhance and maximise their learning in other subjects. There is a strong and appropriate emphasis on developing literacy, speaking and listening skills, as well as mathematical skills. This approach is helping pupils access many other areas more effectively. The management and organisation for pupils to be included in mainstream classes are seamless, and the support given to individuals is sensitive and highly effective. There are very few computers for pupils to use when working in the speech and language unit. This restricts them developing their ICT skills through the use of relevant software to support their learning.
38. Provision for learning outside the school day is excellent. There are breakfast clubs, lunchtime activities and after-school provision. Departments offer drop-in facilities, revision groups and additional pre-examination support. Extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for the gifted and talented to develop their skills further, for example through sports teams, but also help all students to develop their personal fitness and healthy lifestyle. The drama department makes a valuable contribution to school life through extra-curricular activities, including annual school productions with the music department. This year, some 50 pupils were involved in performing 'The Wiz', a rock musical version of 'The Wizard of Oz'. Drama evenings are also held during the year to present examination work. There are two after-school drama clubs and theatre trips are arranged regularly.
39. The school accommodation is very good with some excellent features. The headteacher, governors and senior management team have been very active and successful in their pursuit of sources of funding. This has resulted in a number of significant improvements in the last three years. Plans are well advanced for further state-of-the-art additions in the near future to extend provision for sport, general classrooms and the school hall, and build a performing arts centre and Adult Education provision.
40. The level of resources in the school is satisfactory overall, with excellent resources in physical education. Throughout the school, pupils are provided with up-to-date textbooks and school-produced resources of a high quality. A wide range of practical equipment is also used effectively to promote learning. Whereas some areas of the school are very well provided with ICT, there are a number of subject areas where access to ICT is very limited. This reduces the opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their ICT skills, as well as to use ICT effectively as a resource for learning. This is particularly the case in mathematics, science, history, modern foreign languages and religious education. Although the overall level of ICT resources is broadly average, access to and use of computers has been inconsistent across the curriculum.

41. Teachers are well qualified and there is a very good match to the curriculum. In the case of the physical education department, staff have additional qualifications relating to the sports and activities they coach. The school has undertaken 'workforce reform' wholeheartedly and with very good effect. The large team of support staff is used very creatively to support learning and enable teachers to concentrate on their teaching. Teaching assistants are allocated to each faculty to work as part of the teaching team.

Sixth form

42. The curriculum is very good in the sixth form. The school provides a wide range of courses, ranging from basic skills to A-level, some as shared provision with a nearby grammar school. The key strength of the sixth form curriculum is flexibility, so that the school will tailor provision to meet the needs of individual students, for example in enabling a student to follow two courses at school and one at a local college. The school regularly accepts international students who study vocational subjects as well as English language qualifications. Students in the sixth form include those new to the school as part of the élite academies in athletics and rugby. All students follow a core programme that includes citizenship, religious education and physical education in addition to examination courses. Additional enrichment opportunities are provided by links with local business and community organisations. Some students undertake work shadowing and others help with mentoring younger pupils.

Care, guidance and support

The school's provision of support, advice and guidance for pupils is excellent. Steps taken to involve pupils in school life and respond to their views are good. Procedures for ensuring pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Arrangements to care for pupils' pastoral and academic interests are very well structured.
- The monitoring and support of pupils' personal and academic progress result in excellent feedback to the pupils and, therefore, excellent support and advice benefits all pupils.

Commentary

43. Pupils' personal development is given as much priority as their academic progress. The school has given a great deal of innovative and constructive thought to providing a system that includes individual pupil mentors, year managers and key stage managers. This has resulted in excellent support and guidance for pupils, and an improvement from the previous inspection, which had reported that this aspect was good.
44. All pupils' development and needs are well known because there is regular discussion, coupled with good record-keeping and excellent lines of communication. Pupils with particular needs are identified and the pastoral team's support for them is very effective, so that all pupils are given every chance to learn and mature. The school keeps detailed records of pupils' personal development and has a carefully structured

way of dealing with behavioural problems through graded consequences coupled with an effective social inclusion room. Pupils who otherwise might find class hard to cope with are given the respite they need for as long as they need it. Pupils regard this room as a haven in which they may get on with the work that they would be doing in class in a warm and nurturing environment. As one young man said 'they always know how to calm me down' as he eagerly looked up Oliver Cromwell in his book and on the Internet. Other needs, including those for gifted and talented pupils, are also well met through special groups, homework clubs, clubs for almost all subjects, and a breakfast club.

45. Pupils who are in the early stages of learning English are given very good support. The EAL co-ordinator liaises closely with staff in English, mathematics and science. Written advice is provided for all subject departments and training sessions for staff are given annually. Those pupils with most need are targeted for extra support within lessons or individual teaching sessions. Assessments are updated regularly, when targets for improvement are set and reviewed.
46. There is now evidence that the level of exclusions is falling significantly because of the school's successful and consistently applied strategies. When pupils are excluded – usually for just one day- there are systems to monitor their behaviour on return. Staff have consistent ways of dealing with any difficult behaviour. In general they are very successful, especially after pupils have learnt to respect boundaries after a year or two in the school.
47. Individual pupil mentors play a key role in the system of support and guidance. They have been very well trained and each takes a personal interest in small groups of pupils whom they meet weekly. Because of this very well organised, consistent and positive time, pupils are confident that their academic progress is continually guided by adults who know their needs well, and who are there just for them. In addition a school-based youth worker is developing many schemes within the school and he also has close links with the community and other schools. This provides a growing network of connections and activities that further support pupils.
48. Year managers provide very good support for pupils' behaviour and attendance. They move up the school with the pupils and know them very well. Unlike many schools, year managers do not have a teaching responsibility and they are available to see pupils or their parents throughout the school day. They significantly contribute to pupils' development and have each developed skills in specialist areas, for example, eating disorders. Peer mentoring by sixth formers also gives valuable support to pupils. As a result, pupils feel very well cared for. About ninety percent of pupils in the main school answering the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they have adults to whom they can turn if they have problems.
49. The school has recently revived the school council, which encourages a strong sense of self-worth among pupils and enables staff to have a clear idea of pupils' views. The success of the school council in identifying and communicating its concerns is illustrated well in the improving toilet facilities.
50. Statutory requirements for provision as outlined in pupils' Statements of Special Educational Needs are met. Reviews of statements and individual education plans are

regular and effective, with contributions from teachers, parents and support staff. Individual support and guidance for all pupils with special educational needs are very good. At present there is not full access to the school for those with physical difficulties, and they are guided to another designated local school.

51. The excellent support, care and guidance provided for pupils with speech and language difficulties mean that pupils grow in confidence and become mature young adults who have the necessary skills for future life. The school's nurturing ethos has a strong influence on the pupils' attitudes and outlook towards one another, and differences are respected. The idea that everyone is special helps all pupils understand more clearly their strengths and areas of challenge. The leadership of the speech and language provision sets a clear direction for helping pupils achieve their best, and there is a strong sense of teamwork amongst teachers and support staff. All pupils throughout the school are helped to understand and respect the speech and language work, thus building a more tolerant atmosphere for everyone.
52. First aid procedures meet requirements and staff have been properly trained. The school can respond quickly to the needs of individual pupils. The school's staff are well qualified to deal with pupils' medical needs. The school is prepared to respond quickly and effectively to any emergencies. Child protection systems follow the local authority policy although more formal staff training would ensure that everyone, including newcomers, is up to speed.
53. Professional safety checks on equipment are undertaken and the school commissioned an external report on health and safety, and adopted many of its recommendations, to further improve provision. Governors and staff school undertake risk assessments and audits of the school grounds. However, it would be an advantage to formalise and make more frequent regular inspections and audits. This is necessary in a school where there is a considerable amount of building work and outside users on the site.

Sixth form

54. The provision of support, advice and guidance is excellent in the sixth form. The school values students' views and responds to them very well. All students say the school is well run and that they are valued as individuals. They enjoy being students in the sixth form.
55. A fifth of those responding to the pre-inspection survey said that they do not receive helpful advice but inspectors found a very wide range of advice and guidance. Regular one-to-one meetings with learning mentors provide good quality support. These enable students to take responsibility for managing their own learning. Each meeting with the mentor is well focused and constructive.
56. Students are encouraged to join clubs and take part in sports and other activities and trips abroad. Some students help to run clubs in the main school. The lack of good common room facilities means that students do not have the social space that exists in some schools, though they can relax in the well-equipped study centre.
57. Students value the community work they are encouraged to do and some students act as learning assistants in classrooms for the younger pupils. This helps their personal

development, as do subjects such as social care, which is often linked to their own experience of life. Students recognise that their studies have a significant influence on their understanding of themselves and others. Some students have been elected onto a sixth form council.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has good links with parents, very good links with the community and excellent links with other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is continuing to build up excellent links with local schools and colleges and this is of significant benefit to all its pupils and students.
- Pupils' end-of-year and briefer termly monitoring reports and the website provide parents with good information.

Commentary

58. Links with parents are good, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. There are good systems to keep parents involved and informed, for example, through meetings or newsletters. Parents of younger pupils are asked to sign a weekly planner. This helps them to keep in touch with their children's work, conduct and homework, and enables them to communicate with their children's year manager if necessary. There are extra meetings for parents of pupils who have to decide on GCSE and sixth form options.
59. Attendance at all parents' consultation evenings, and at special events such as the options evening and the summer show, is good. Parents consult year managers if they have any concerns, and the school has just started using parent focus groups. This results in good identification of parents' views and enables the school act on these, for example modifying wording in 'Learning Practice' modules that have replaced homework. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are fully involved in annual reviews.
60. The school attracts pupils from a number of primary schools. It is oversubscribed. All prospective pupils have met staff during an induction day and the school has visited all the feeder schools so that they have a great deal of information about the pupils when they first arrive. This helps to ensure a smooth transition and induction into the school, and guides the school's decisions about the structure of classes. As a result, pupils settle in very easily.
61. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all parents agreed that their children like the school, are not harassed and are encouraged to mature. Most feel well informed about their children's progress. Annual reports on pupils' progress provide parents and pupils with information about the levels reached and some specific guidance on the steps pupils need to take in order to improve their learning. Interim reports give useful indications as to their children's attainment and level of effort. Pupils' personal planners are used well, regularly checked by the well-trained learning mentors and, in the case of younger pupils, signed by parents. They provide

a valuable means of communication between teachers and parents. Any behaviour slips or other monitoring information about pupils' behaviour are shared with parents and this very good practice ensures that school and family fully share in pupils' education.

62. The links with other neighbouring schools are very close. Links include the neighbouring junior school and hospital school. Community links are very good in general and focused mainly on sporting links. Pupils benefit from the large number of contacts providing work placements and experience in the community. The school's press officer ensures that its activities are well reported and this adds to all pupils' self-esteem and involvement with the community.
63. The school's spectacular sports facilities are used by the community and the specialist sports academies developing on the site. The partnership development manager provides a strong link with other schools in the area. Links with sports clubs and coaches have been formed and the academies benefit from their expertise. The partnership is only in the second year but has already set up a web site to disseminate information to the wider community. The primary school pupils are beginning to develop more skills in sport and their standard on intake will gradually be raised. Parents of pupils in the main school are fully informed about progress and behaviour through telephone calls, meetings and interviews.

Sixth form

64. The school has excellent links with other schools and colleges in the area. This means that students can extend the range of courses available to them by shared provision with other institutions.
65. There are good industry links and the school successfully places pupils in local educational, health and business organisations as part of their courses. Students' progress off site is carefully monitored through visits by staff. The school organises visitors, for example, the local member of Parliament meets with sixth formers, taking their well thought out questions and encouraging their participation in the political process.
66. Information provided for parents is good. They are invited to an information day when students enter the sixth form. Many were not able to come but were given a wealth of written material and have further opportunities to come to parents' evenings and to keep track of students' progress through regular reports.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. Governance is good. The governing body has many strengths, but it has not ensured that all statutory requirements are met. There is limited time for religious education in Years 10 and 11, and provision for collective worship is inconsistent. However, these omissions are not affecting pupils' personal development. Provision for ICT is limited, and this is a barrier to ICT being used to best effect in teaching and learning in some subjects.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The senior leadership group's very clear vision focuses provision very effectively on the needs of every pupil.
- Very good management at all levels ensures high standards of teaching and learning.
- The school uses grants and other income judiciously and creatively.
- Leadership in the sixth form is very good and there is good management.

Commentary

67. The leadership by the headteacher is outstanding. His vision, based on *Those that have the least, get the best*, permeates the school and generates a positive ethos. The senior leadership team is very strong. The team has generated creative solutions to problems encountered by disadvantaged pupils. The appointment of enthusiastic and effective teaching and non-teaching staff is given a high priority. The talents of staff, at all levels, are tapped and developed through rigorous performance management and insightful delegation. For example, the director of sport and the head of physical education regularly speak at regional and national conferences to encourage others to develop sport and physical education to the maximum potential. The leaders of faculties, special needs, each key stage and year, hold the school's vision well and weld teams that are strongly focused on achievement and learning for pupils with a very wide range of learning needs. The pastoral system is innovative. Half-termly, in-depth interviews with mentors help all pupils to learn. The curriculum is imaginative and closely matched to the needs of current pupils. Weekly faculty meetings review the curriculum and the progress of pupils in a methodical way. The continuous educational debate that is generated provides a very favourable context within which pupils achieve very well.
68. Governance is good. Governors are well involved in development planning, such as planning for partnerships with local primary and special schools and the extension of youth and adult work. The governing body reviews school performance well and they have a very good overview of the school's main strengths and weaknesses. They approve the school's policies, including those on racial equality and access for all, both of which are central to the school's operations. The governing body meets its responsibilities in many respects. However, that relating to a daily act of collective worship is barely fulfilled. Although 'thought for the day' is well planned and appropriate, pupils are not always given sufficient time to reflect on the key messages. Nevertheless, this is not having an impact on pupils' personal development, which is very good. Although there is limited time for religious education in Years 10 and 11, this also does not impact on pupils' achievement, which is very good. In addition, pupils do not have sufficient access to ICT in all lessons across the curriculum. This is a barrier to making the best use of learning opportunities, for example, for supporting pupils with weak literacy skills.
69. Management is very good. There are robust procedural structures in place. Rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school through line managers to the senior leadership team lead to very effective strategic planning. Staff use data very well to plan and assess pupils' progress. The strategies being implemented to improve the under-achievement of boys are proving beneficial. The special needs department is very successful in promoting achievement; about half of all pupils in the school have some form of special educational need and they achieve very well.
70. Performance management processes are used to empower and energise individual members of both teaching and support staff to develop their careers linked to the targets of the school improvement plan. The induction of new members of staff is very well organised; newly qualified teachers then follow their own programme of professional development. Grants are given to teachers in their second and third years to research and develop aspects of teaching and learning in their own particular area that will be beneficial to both pupils and colleagues.

71. Staff are well supported to achieve and are held to account for their achievements. There is a strong commitment to staff training and, apart from lack of expertise in using ICT, needs analysis is accurate. The school has a group of 12 teacher trainees on the Graduate Training Programme. Senior staff at the school provide a weekly programme of lectures on teaching-related topics and other subject staff, mainly heads of department, act as mentors to the trainees and train them in classroom skills. Approximately half the trainees stay on each year to become part of the teaching work force, helping the school to maintain its full complement of staff. It is a measure of the confidence and strength of the leadership and management that the school has been able to adopt another local secondary school that is in very challenging circumstances. Staff at all levels are successfully involved in this initiative.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,170,902	Balance from previous year	332,189
Total expenditure	4,592,030	Balance carried forward to the next	911,061
Expenditure per student	4,419		

72. There are excellent financial controls and the principles of best value are applied well. As a result of the workforce reforms, expenditure on teaching assistants, administrative staff and other non-teaching personnel is well above average but impacts positively on pupils' achievement. The expenditure per pupil is above average, but it is comparable to that of schools with similarly disadvantaged pupils. The school has been particularly successful in applying for additional government grants and in generating additional income from facilities and services. These are ploughed back into the school to support teaching and learning. The current high levels of carry forward are earmarked for improvements in the accommodation, such as the performing arts block and extension of the kitchen and hall. Priorities included in the school development plan are appropriate. However, increased provision for ICT is needed so that the very good provision in some areas is extended to all.
73. The very good leadership and management reported in the previous inspection have been maintained. Standards of achievement continue to rise more quickly than expected. Attendance has been greatly improved and is now satisfactory. The quality of provision has improved beyond all recognition for the benefit of pupils and the community. Pupils and parents are very satisfied with the provision. This represents very good improvement since the last inspection and the school provides very good value for money.

Sixth form

74. There is very good leadership in the sixth form. It has a similar positive and supportive ethos to that found in the main school. A wide range of vocational courses is offered to students in a continuous attempt to match students' interests, abilities and aspirations. Good management ensures that regular meetings promote good practice and generate a good sense of teamwork. Although lessons are regularly monitored, there is some inconsistent practice and students achieve better on some courses than in others.
75. Financial management of the sixth form is as efficient as that in the main school; provision gives good value for money. In extending provision to meet the needs of individual students, the school has made good use of additional income-generating activities and grants.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

Provision for work-related learning (WRL) is excellent; it meets statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very wide range of vocational courses significantly enhances pupils' experiences.
- Innovative curriculum development and planning ensure that all pupils benefit from the provision.
- The curriculum provides excellent opportunities for progression in WRL in the sixth form.
- The mentoring system is very effective in sustaining a focus on pupils' WRL experiences.

Commentary

76. There are excellent opportunities for pupils to learn from the world of work through vocational courses and work-related contexts in other courses. All pupils take at least one vocational course and a GCSE humanities course that includes a study of the world of work. The existence of a vocational education faculty with an oversight of many of these courses is testimony to the school's commitment to vocational education. The faculty makes a significant contribution to WRL, including offering a very wide range of sixth form courses to link with those in Years 10 and 11. Provision is not just from within the vocational education faculty. Courses overseen by other faculties include BTEC courses in sport and the performing arts, applied art and design and a newly introduced GCSE in manufacturing. Again, there are strong links to sixth form courses.
77. Pupils gain a very wide experience of WRL through vocational courses. They investigate local business organisations in leisure and tourism as well as in applied business. In health and social care they learn about skills necessary in the workplace in the care of young children, and in art and design they meet and work with practising artists. Other courses reinforce relevant key skills and knowledge, including working in groups in music, using data in science and giving presentations in modern languages. Teaching, learning and achievement were all excellent in manufacturing and in leisure and tourism lessons sampled. They were very good in art and ICT. They were satisfactory in applied business and in health and social care. Standards in sampled lessons were average except in applied business, where they were below average, and in manufacturing, where they were above average.
78. The mentoring system is very effective in keeping WRL and careers education at the forefront of pupils' learning experiences. Part of the whole-school mentoring system is to record pupils' WRL experiences. The mentoring process involves only small groups of pupils and this adds to the quality of the WRL-related support and advice that pupils receive. Mentors are supported by advice from the Connexions service. They manage the briefing and de-briefing of pupils for their two weeks' work experience in Year 10. Connexions advisers interview all pupils in Years 10 and 11, as well as working with groups of Year 9 pupils prior to them choosing their options. Work experience is well organised with close co-operation with the local education business partnership. All pupils also have opportunities to sample college taster courses and there is a very wide range of additional vocational provision to support pupils with particular needs.

79. Excellent leadership has given a very clear direction to the development of WRL. Despite the wide range of provision already in place prior to new statutory requirements, the development of WRL has been addressed with energy and determination. Provision meets fully statutory requirements. Policy and planning, informed by an audit of current provision, provide very strong momentum. A typically innovative approach constantly embraces new ideas and approaches to further enhance provision.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English and French were inspected in full and Spanish was sampled.

Three lessons were observed in **Spanish**. Teaching was very good and pupils achieved very well. In Year 10 the very good planning and pace over two lessons, in which pupils prepared a video recording of presentations about school life, meant that their confidence in speaking as well as their range of language increased. Pupils were given the opportunity to work collaboratively and were able to reflect on and evaluate their own performance.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good throughout the school; test and examination results are much better than those in similar schools.
- Weak writing skills are a barrier to the highest standards in examinations.
- The department is very well managed, and its work is well organised.

Commentary

80. Year 9 test results in 2003 were well below the national average, but well above the average for similar schools. Results in English, however, were not as good as those in mathematics and science. Standards have varied in recent years, but are higher than at the time of the last inspection. 2004 results show further improvement, with a significant increase in the proportion reaching the expected level, though not the higher levels. GCSE results for English in 2003 were slightly below average, but again well above average for similar schools. Girls did considerably better than boys, compared with national trends. Results were well below average in GCSE English Literature; some two thirds of pupils took this examination. Results in English fell slightly in 2004, but were much better in English Literature.

81. Achievement is good throughout the school, including that of the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Standards of work seen during the inspection were better than those in recent examination results because class work is carefully structured and supported by teachers. Speaking skills are average. Pupils answer teachers' questions clearly and make constructive contributions to informal paired and small group discussions. With few exceptions, they listen well to teachers and other pupils. When they enter the school, standards in reading and writing are well below average. By Year 9, standards have improved but remain below average. Teachers work hard to develop reading skills and understanding in lessons. Teaching assistants and special needs staff provide very good extra help for lower attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8. Extension classes are also run for higher attainers. However, most pupils do not read enough and they lack confidence. Library resources within the school are limited. Pupils need more encouragement for wider, personal reading. Written work is set and marked regularly. Pupils make a good effort to write fully and in detail. Very good practice was seen in one Year 7 lesson to develop more imaginative descriptive writing. Homework is also used very well to provide opportunities for more extended writing. But for most pupils, and especially for boys, errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation hold back overall standards.
82. Teachers have very good expectations for GCSE work. Standards are average by Year 11. Extended personal and creative writing is well structured and often very expressive. Higher and middle attaining pupils also write intelligently about literature they have studied. Essays are developed in sufficient depth, with good use of textual detail to support arguments. Coursework is well presented. There are many examples of word-processed and desktop published work in all year groups to show that ICT is used well to aid work in the subject. However, technical accuracy remains a significant problem. Writing errors prevent many pupils from reaching the standard required for higher GCSE grades.
83. Teaching is good. Teachers manage pupils very well, and positive relationships are formed. They know their subject well, though the range of methods and resources could be more varied to engage all pupils actively. The timing and pace of lessons are also not always well judged. Sometimes too many activities are planned, so that effort is rushed and assimilation of ideas is limited. The end of the lesson often suffers and there is insufficient time to evaluate achievement in final plenary sessions. However, pupils' learning is good. They acquire skills and knowledge well, closely supported by their teachers. Staff are prepared to give additional personal help and guidance, where they are needed, in after-school study sessions. Assessment of pupils' work is very good, and most pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve further.
84. The subject is well led and the head of department provides a very good role model in her own work. The department is very well managed. Subject planning is well organised and kept under continuing review. A programme of lesson observations, and checking of work set, is carried out systematically. Staff co-operate well together to share best practice. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

85. Literacy skills are well below average on entry to the school. Whilst pupils make good progress, skills remain below average overall by the time they reach Year 11. The literacy co-ordinator works hard to provide advice and training for staff. Some effective strategies for teaching writing skills in particular are now embedded in lesson planning for most subjects.
86. Good practice was seen in modelling of skills and the use of writing frames, to help pupils develop and structure written work effectively, in science, history and geography. Pupils also have good opportunities to produce extended and creative writing in English. Key words are taught and displayed in most subjects, including music, physical education and mathematics. ICT lessons also promote better standards of technical accuracy through the use of spelling and grammar checkers. In speaking, pupils share ideas well in informal group discussions, but more emphasis could be given to presentation skills, for example in pupil reports to the whole class in final plenary sessions. The school also provides very good additional support for the development of literacy for pupils with special educational needs. But much scope remains for further improvement, in particular in developing reading skills and the technical accuracy of written work. Spelling is a problem for the majority of pupils.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership is very good; there is a clear vision and a shared commitment to raising standards.
- Pupils achieve very well; they have positive attitudes to language learning because of very good teaching.
- Very good assessment procedures mean that all pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- There are too few opportunities to extend learning through ICT and independent reading.

Commentary

87. Results in GCSE examinations were below average in French in 2003 and 2004. However pupils enter the school with well below average standards overall and low levels of literacy. Results at GCSE are below average, but this represents very good achievement for these pupils and is an improvement since the last inspection.
88. Achievement is very good by Year 9 and Year 11. Standards seen in French in Year 9 are below average. Most pupils speak confidently with good pronunciation in simple conversations. They take part in a range of listening and reading tasks and are developing good listening skills. However, they cannot tackle longer reading tasks and only higher attaining pupils can produce more extended spoken and written French. Most pupils require some support such as a framework or key words to support their own productive language. Pupils understand and respond well to explanations and instructions in the foreign language. They are developing good grammatical understanding and starting to use the past tense in their speaking and writing. In Year 11, standards seen are average, which again is very good achievement in a subject which requires a range of literacy skills. Pupils are already preparing writing

coursework tasks, and in speaking all pupils can express opinions and talk about a range of topics. In one lesson, pupils were able to talk about work experience in the past and write about it in preparation for their writing coursework. Higher attaining pupils could do this independently while other pupils needed more support. All pupils are able to cope with a wide range of GCSE-level listening and reading tasks and have all achieved the first two modules of their GCSE course.

89. Teaching and learning are very good in all years. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and provide a very good model for pupils' own language so that pupils contribute confidently to speaking activities. They have high expectations and place good emphasis on pupils' accuracy and pronunciation. Teachers manage lessons very well and relationships are positive so that pupils work effectively in pairs and groups and listen well to each other. Teachers plan a range of motivating activities so that all pupils learn at a good pace and have positive attitudes to language learning. Homework or 'Learning Practice' tasks reinforce the language pupils learn in class and support pupils' independent learning at all levels of ability. Marking is extremely thorough with comments on how to improve individual pieces of work, and oral feedback is very constructive. All pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve as a result of well-targeted end-of-module tests and the opportunities provided to reflect on their own performance. Although teachers provide a range of opportunities for both collaborative and independent learning, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use ICT and independent reading to support their language learning.
90. Leadership and management in the faculty are very good. The head of faculty has been in post just over three years and has transformed the modern foreign languages faculty so that it is now high profile and high performing. Faculty documentation and policies are very good, including the schemes of work for all languages, and they are reflected in consistent classroom practice. The support for and the deployment of staff, including the faculty teaching assistant, are very good. The faculty uses data effectively to review overall performance and targets as well as at individual pupil level. The whole faculty is involved in other activities such as the language club and trips that support the profile of languages in the school. Overall improvement since the last inspection is very good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curriculum leadership and management are good, resulting in very good teamwork.
- Teaching is good, and pupils respond well; standards are rising.
- Assessment of pupils' work is regular, with good guidance about how to improve.
- There is insufficient use of computers and practical equipment to enhance learning opportunities.

Commentary

91. On entry to the school pupils' overall standards in mathematics are well below average. Results in the national tests in 2003 in Year 9 were also well below average. They were average when compared with pupils in schools with similar standards on entry, indicating satisfactory achievement. Results were similar to those in English and science, and girls performed better than boys. In 2004, there was a significant improvement in standards, especially in the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades. These results were better than those gained in science, and much better than those in English.
92. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, standards were well below average for the proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades, but above average in the range A*-G. Pupils performed better in mathematics than in most of their subjects, with boys doing particularly well. The achievement of these pupils since their national tests in Year 9 was good. In 2004, there was further improvement in overall results, with girls performing better than boys. These results are the highest the school has ever attained in the range A*-C.
93. In work seen during the inspection, achievement is good and standards are clearly improving. They are still below average by Year 9 and Year 11, but higher than in recent examinations. This is because of the quality of support from teachers and support assistants, and pupils' determination to succeed. Their attitude to work is very good in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. The organisation of alternate boy/girl seating is used consistently, and has a positive impact on learning. Extension exercises are available for pupils in each class, so that all pupils can work at their own level. Pupils with special educational needs are well known by their teachers, and they also are set work at the appropriate level. As a result, they generally make good progress.
94. Teaching and learning are good, and occasionally very good. Teachers insist on pupils presenting their work clearly and methodically, so that good habits are developed. Planning of the content of lessons is thorough, but less time is devoted to devising interesting learning strategies. Teaching is therefore thorough, but occasionally lacks flair. There is good use of starter activities to consolidate work from previous lessons, but teachers occasionally talk for too long. The marking of pupils' work is regular; in the best examples it provides information about the level of the work, and advice about how to improve. Very good records are maintained about the progress of each pupil against their personal targets. Pupils normally concentrate very well, but a quicker response is required from teachers to the small minority of pupils who, particularly in Year 11, show a lack of concentration.

95. Curriculum leadership and management in mathematics are good. The head of department is a very good role model; he has very good relationships with adults and pupils, leading to very good teamwork. There is a detailed scheme of work, providing good guidance for teachers. However, there are insufficient references to citizenship, or to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Furthermore, there is insufficient integration of ICT into the curriculum because of a lack of software, and limited access to hardware. This restricts learning opportunities. There are regular lesson observations and thorough monitoring of examination data, and each meeting of the department includes a review of the quality of provision. This is helping to improve standards. Improvement since the last report has been good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

96. Numerical skills are below average throughout the school. Since the previous inspection, the mathematics department has produced a detailed policy for the development of mathematics across the curriculum. There is a clear intention to increase the monitoring of provision, and to raise awareness of pupils' needs. However, there has been a high turnover of staff within the school. Further training is therefore required for both teaching and non-teaching staff to improve consistency in the use of mathematical terms, and to ensure that support for pupils' mathematical development is carefully planned.

97. Many subjects are already making a good contribution to the use of mathematics, for example in the solving of formulae, and in the analysis of data, for instance in using graphs. Particular emphasis is placed on the use of mathematics in physical education and in modern languages. In physical education, teachers even refer to different National Curriculum levels in mathematics when testing pupils' ability to handle data about football. In French, pupils are required to analyse data about France, such as population statistics, life expectancy and religion. These two subjects set an example for others to follow in their contribution to the development of pupils' confidence in the use of number.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of faculty provides very good leadership and management with a strong focus on raising standards.
- The use of a wide range of teaching and learning styles is effective in meeting the needs of individual pupils.
- There is insufficient access to ICT to promote learning.

Commentary

98. In 2003, the test results for pupils in Year 9 were well below average; in 2004, they were below average. These results are better than expected, given pupils' test results when they entered the school, and show an improving trend. Results were better in science than in English, but not as good as in mathematics. In GCSE examinations,

results show a downward trend. Results dipped in 2004, at a time when there were significant staff changes in science. In 2003, GCSE results were below average. This is better than expected, given pupils' previous test results, although pupils generally did worse in science than in their other subjects. However, when compared with results in similar schools, based on prior attainment, results in Years 9 and 11 were above average in 2003. In 2004, Year 9 results are well above those in similar schools, showing a continuing trend of improvement.

99. Achievement in science is good. Standards on entry to the school are well below average. Work seen during the inspection was just below average in Year 9. This represents good achievement. Pupils are confident in the use of scientific apparatus and they can record observations and measurements accurately. A number of pupils have poor literacy skills, making it difficult for them to read for understanding and learn key scientific terms. By Year 11, standards are below average. This also represents good achievement. Pupils are able to apply their numeracy skills to investigational work, although low levels of literacy continue to hinder the written work of some pupils. In all year groups, there is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Throughout the faculty, there is insufficient access to ICT to enable pupils to practise their skills and use ICT as a resource for learning science.
100. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 a significant proportion of lessons seen were very good or excellent. There is an effective balance of high expectations, challenging work, support and praise. This helps to increase pupils' confidence and assist their learning and personal development. The use of humour in lessons and the development of effective relationships also motivate pupils to achieve well. A wide range of teaching and learning styles is used and this keeps pupils interested and focused on their work. Teachers use creative techniques to improve pupils' literacy skills and to enable them to use scientific terms with increasing confidence. Pupils are set clear targets for improvement and they also actively participate in identifying and setting their own targets. Excellent displays are actively used during lessons to improve learning. In a very small proportion of lessons, expectations are too low and relationships are not productive. Therefore, too much time is spent on managing pupils' behaviour.
101. The new head of faculty leads very well, with great sensitivity and an absolute commitment to raising pupils' aspirations. She is an extremely effective role model of excellent teaching and high professional standards, and colleagues support her very well. On appointment, the head of faculty quickly identified areas for improvement and made rapid changes to the curriculum, the deployment of staff, and the induction and professional development of staff. She also implemented rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluation. There has not yet been sufficient time for these initiatives to have their full impact on standards. Effective use is made of the teaching time available, given that the allocation for science in Years 10 and 11 is below average. The technicians provide very effective support for learning, and teaching assistants make a significant contribution to the achievement of pupils with special educational needs. All staff contribute to the strong sense of teamwork. Overall, there has been good progress in science since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision in ICT is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is very well led and managed.
- The redesigned curriculum for Years 7 to 9 has resulted in very good achievement.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 are making very good progress in studying for external examinations.
- Assessment is very good and helps pupils know how to improve.
- Less experienced teachers have problems with the behaviour management of pupils.

Commentary

102. According to teacher assessment in 2003, pupils achieved above average results. The first group of students took GCSE examinations in ICT in 2004; national results are not yet available for comparison, but results in ICT were better than all other subjects. There has been a steady improvement in standards, particularly for boys.
103. The standards of pupils on entry to the school are well below average. In Year 9, standards observed in work seen were below average and by Year 11, standards are in line with national expectations. This represents very good achievement overall. Pupils with special educational needs are achieving as well as other pupils, some obtaining results at the end of Year 11 well above those predicted.
104. Teaching and learning are very good overall. The teaching by the head of faculty is consistently very good and some very good teaching has been seen from other staff. However, some less experienced staff, while they have very good subject knowledge and plan very well, need support in the behaviour management of pupils. Pupils are able to work very well collaboratively and there is very good encouragement of independent work. For example, the Year 11 GNVQ group is able to work with a minimum of support and their achievement is excellent. Assessment is very good and ensures that pupils know how to make improvements to their work. The faculty has good support from the faculty learning support assistant and there is very effective technical support. The subject makes a very good contribution to literacy, with key words used and displayed effectively and opportunities for literacy identified in all planning.
105. Leadership and management are very good. The head of faculty has rewritten the schemes of work in line with national recommendations and these are being implemented very successfully, leading to very good achievement. He is building up a very good faculty with very knowledgeable teachers and is improving the status of ICT within the school.
106. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. All issues have been addressed; there are now ICT courses for all pupils in Years 10 to 11, and the department promotes independent learning very well.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

107. The use of ICT to enrich learning in other areas of the curriculum is unsatisfactory, as provision has not kept pace with technological developments. This was a key issue in the previous report and it has not as yet been fully addressed in all subjects.

Competence in ICT is below average in Years 7 to 9 but average in Years 10 and 11. Staff are eager to use ICT, but have difficulties of access and the resources in some subjects are inadequate. The use of ICT is unsatisfactory in two of the core subjects, mathematics and science. It is good in English, design and technology, art, business education and music and it is excellent in physical education. The very good practice in these subjects needs to be extended to all.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good, leading to very good achievement.
- Very good leadership is developing the capacity of the subject to raise standards.
- The continued lack of access to ICT is a barrier to a wider range of learning.

Commentary

108. In teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9, standards have shown continued improvement over the last four years. They are now close to the national expectation. Geography is part of a GCSE Humanities course in Years 10 and 11. In 2003, results in this course were in line with the national average. The most recent results, in 2004, showed an improvement with the proportions of grades in the ranges A*-C and A*-G being above average.

109. Pupils achieve very well in geography. On entry to the school, standards are well below average and geographical skills and knowledge are undeveloped. By Year 9, standards are close to, but still below, the national expectation. This represents good achievement, particularly by girls. In Years 7 to 9 pupils gain knowledge of basic geography and number skills and are introduced to enquiry work. Written skills are limited, but there is a gradual widening of writing styles and increase of imaginative writing, seen in a number of 'news' reports. Pupils begin to gain an understanding of more complex processes in work on erosion and global issues, and they learn the vocabulary with which they can explain them. Standards are very varied, but all pupils, regardless of gender, ethnicity or ability, are able to make good progress through the use of well-prepared appropriate materials. They gain confidence and are able to participate well in oral work. In Years 7 to 9 pupils improve both social and geographical skills through a developing programme of fieldwork. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and make progress as well as their peers.

110. By Year 11 standards are average, representing very good achievement from entry to the school. Pupils learn to think for themselves and make further advances in their ability to explain and give reasons, rather than just describe. Literacy skills improve and pupils become less teacher-dependent. Although learning is helped by the learning practice programme, pupils are not able to use ICT skills regularly to develop either writing or numeracy skills.

111. Teaching and learning are very good overall; they are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are reinforced through repetition and good questioning. Good use of audiovisual aids stimulates interest and concentration, and experienced teaching assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. Good challenge and high expectation keep pupils involved and on task and understanding improves accordingly. The needs of all pupils are carefully identified and provided for and this helps those pupils who require a lot of help. Assessment is a very useful and well-developed tool, especially in Years 7 to 9, and pupils are aware of how well they are doing.
112. Leadership and management are very good; teachers consistently review the effectiveness of provision. Good work has been done on rewriting schemes of work and improving the way the subject is taught. Good support comes from an energetic, expert and united team. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department is very well led and managed and this is helping to raise standards.
- Achievement in history is very good.
- The focus on improvements in teaching skills has led to improvements in learning.
- Assessment is very good and pupils know how well they are doing.
- Teachers and pupils do not make enough use of ICT in teaching and learning.

Commentary

113. Standards are improving in history. In 2003, assessments of pupils in Year 9 showed that standards were well below average, but results for 2004 show considerable improvement, though they are still below average. History is part of a GCSE humanities course in Years 10 and 11. In 2003, results in this course were in line with the national average. The most recent results, in 2004, showed an improvement with the proportions of pupils achieving grades in the ranges A*-C and A*-G being above average.
114. Achievement in history is very good. Pupils enter the school with well below average standards overall but they reach average standards in GCSE examinations. Inspection evidence shows that the standard of work in Year 9 in history is still generally below the national average, but there is some significant improvement. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are average. Girls' standards are better than boys, reflecting their more advanced literacy skills, but pupils of all levels of ability do well. Their books show that most pupils approach their studies conscientiously. All the pupils can identify and use different sources of information. In an excellent Year 9 lesson on the atomic bomb, pupils watched a video simulation of the original flight and explosion in Hiroshima. They were able to classify its effects on a time scale and write an essay to explain their reasoning. A Year 11 class seen during the inspection was able to explain how a representative democracy works and why exercising a right to vote is a privilege.
115. Teaching and learning are good overall and in Years 7 to 9, with many lessons that are very good. A key strength of teaching is how lessons are very well planned to meet the needs of learners. The teachers have rewritten their schemes of work to provide a variety of interesting

learning activities. Teachers are very skilled in developing and maintaining good classroom discipline. Pupils work well individually and together and make very good gains in their learning. An after-school history club and excellent wall displays provide extra learning dimensions to support lessons. The local area is used as a rich source of study for fieldwork trips. Learning practice, or homework, is set half termly in advance at different levels to complement and extend the work in school. Assessment strategies are very good. Pupils have verbal and written comments on their progress and they know how well they are doing, and what they have to do to improve.

116. The new head of department shows very good leadership and management skills, working successfully with colleagues in the department and faculty to bring about the improvements. As a team they have developed systems of quality assurance to raise standards of assessment, produced new schemes of work and monitored performance to improve their teaching further. Overall, the subject has made good progress since the last inspection. There is, however, a wealth of ICT-based material available to enhance both the teaching and learning of history still to be incorporated into schemes of work.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective teaching strategies involve pupils in their own learning.
- Assessment and monitoring of progress help pupils to achieve very well.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to the personal development of the pupils.
- Access to ICT to support and extend learning is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

117. In Years 10 and 11, religious education is taught as part of a GCSE humanities course for all pupils. In 2003, results in this course were in line with the national average. Results in 2004 showed an improvement, with the proportions of pupils achieving grades in the ranges A*-C and A*-G being above average.

118. Achievement in religious education is very good. Standards in Year 9 are average. This represents very good achievement, given that standards overall on entry are well below average. Pupils understand symbolism and its use in religious observance, and can explain religious differences. Higher attaining pupils produce some reflective and evaluative work, for instance, on the mysteries of life. Lower attaining pupils find difficulty in written expression, but this improves over time and they produce more detailed answers, as a result of very helpful marking. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as others because of extra help and material tailored to their learning needs. More able pupils are challenged by extra research and project tasks.

119. In Year 11, the standard of work seen is average and achievement is very good. More able pupils produce some very reflective and empathetic writing, for instance, on third world issues. Less able pupils have difficulty expressing more than one point of view, but extended writing skills show very good improvement over time.

120. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are well prepared and effective strategies involve pupils in their own learning. Challenging questioning encourages critical thinking and pupils respond with very good intellectual effort. Pupils work well in class. Assessment contributes significantly to achievement because pupils are aware of their targets and work through manageable steps. Marking of written work is effective in stretching pupils, leading to improvement over time, but some mistakes in grammar and spelling remain. The subject makes a very good contribution to personal development, especially the spiritual and moral aspects of the pupils' lives, through meditation, the exploration of ethical issues, visits to local places of worship and valuable contacts with faith communities. Access to ICT, however, is unsatisfactory and does not support learning as it should.
121. Leadership and management are very good. There is a vision and a commitment to improvement, with a firm focus on more effective teaching and learning. Staff are well supported and the department's self review informs future planning. There is a flexibility in approach that optimises learning opportunities, for instance, in rescheduling the Hinduism module to fit in with the Indian tradition topic covered in the music syllabus. The subject does not fully comply with the requirements for provision in Years 10 and 11 as laid down in the Kent Agreed Syllabus for religious education, having only half the time stipulated, but this does not impact on the achievement of the pupils.
122. Improvement since the last inspection is very good, particularly in the rising standards across all years and teaching and learning that are now very good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE examinations have improved dramatically over the last two years.
- Teaching is very good because there is a strong emphasis on learning; pupils' achievement is very good.
- Leadership and management are very good and there have been excellent improvements since the last inspection.

Commentary

123. Pupils enter the school with lower than average standards. In Year 9, standards seen during the inspection are comparable with other schools nationally. In Year 11, standards are above average. Although examination results were below those expected nationally in 2003, the unvalidated results for 2004 show a dramatic increase from 17 to 57 percent of grades in the range A*-C. This represents very good achievement for all pupils. Because they have a clear understanding of the inter-relationship between design and manufacturing, pupils make good quality products that take clients' needs into account. They are aware of industrial practice, for example, batch production and economical bulk manufacture of products. They know

that there are different kinds of plastics and that they have different properties. There is no difference between the achievements of different groups of pupils. Those with special educational needs and those whose first language is not English achieve as well as others.

124. Teaching and learning are very good. There is little difference in the quality of teaching and learning between Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11. Lessons were judged to be excellent in resistant materials. In the best lessons, practical activities are very well selected to teach pupils how to design. As a result, pupils learn very well. Projects are relevant to pupils' everyday life and good links are made with industrial practice. Very challenging questioning extends and reinforces pupils' learning. Teachers have very good oversight of pupils' learning, so that misconceptions are addressed promptly. Pupils understand the skills of research and evaluation better in resistant materials, graphics and textiles projects than in food. Assessment is very good and the data generated is used to set targets for pupils. Pupils' weak literacy and numeracy skills are well supported. Pupils make good use of ICT to present their work and to understand the application of technology to product design and industrial practice. Pupils learn about modern materials and the application of new technology to product manufacture. Pupils' social and moral development is well supported through paired and group work and through the consideration of environmental issues.

125. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department and his deputy have a very clear vision for the subject. Vocational GCSEs in manufacturing and catering meet pupils' needs very well. Support is provided for pupils to improve their work through after-school and Saturday workshops. Teachers consistently review the effectiveness of provision and suggest improvements. For example, a recent audit of the curriculum has revealed too little emphasis on systems and control and also scope for extending the challenge for the highest achievers. The department works very well as a team. As a result, there have been excellent improvements in the provision since the last inspection. Achievement has been substantially improved over the last two years and the curriculum continues to develop.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design and music were inspected in full and drama was sampled.

Drama is taught as a separate subject in Years 7-9 and is offered as a GCSE option. 2003 examination results were just below average, but they are well below average in 2004. This is explained in part by differences in ability in each year group, but staff absence also altered the pattern of preparation for the examination this year. Two lessons were observed in Years 10 and 11 and teaching was good. Pupils engaged confidently in practical exercises and made good progress.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good, leading to very good achievement.

- Assessment is very good, enabling very good support for all pupils.
- The leadership and management of art and design are very good and there is a strong team committed to raising standards.
- Curriculum topics are sometimes too intellectual for pupils to grasp ideas quickly.

Commentary

126. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were well below average, with a much smaller proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the A*-C range than nationally. Girls did a lot better than boys, and all pupils gained a grade. This is similar to the time of the previous inspection.

127. Pupils achieve very well in art and design. Pupils come into the school with well below average knowledge and skills in art and design. Standards in Year 9 are average, as at the time of the previous inspection. This is very good achievement. Pupils can create imaginative pictures and sculptures based on observational drawing and using ideas they have studied from different periods in art history. Few pupils, however, are able to analyse and explain their work in artistic terms. Standards in the GCSE examination have risen dramatically since 2000 when they were very low. Standards are now average overall. This is very good achievement for the current Year 11, particularly for boys. Pupils in Year 10 are also achieving very well. Pupils with special educational needs achieve equally well because their needs are always taken into account.

128. Teaching and learning are very good and sometimes excellent. All lessons are consistently well planned to include pupils who struggle, as well those who have a particular gift for art, and this enables all to do their best. Teaching assistants are well briefed to enable them to give specific subject support. The best lessons are exciting, challenging and engrossing; pupils become infected with the teachers' enthusiasm. Behaviour is always good and where pupils lack confidence, teachers do their best to encourage them and explain how well they are doing.

Example of outstanding practice

An outstanding Year 11 lesson on how to plan a sculpture from drawings of insects

It was not the careful instruction on how to get more marks in the examination (though this was impressive enough) that first grabbed the pupils' attention: it was the apparently choreographed interaction between the two teachers. The pupils quickly realised that it was their drawings that the teachers were showering with praise and that the quality of their line, tone and detail was sufficient to give a clear idea of the shapes they needed to construct. With the teachers' help, pupils translated the carefully drawn scorpions, dragonflies and beetles into plans to be realised in wire, mesh and plaster. With their enthusiasm, coupled with the encouragement and advice given by the teachers, even the lowest ability pupils managed to discover new ways of drawing. Those that could not wait to get their hands on to the wire and pliers were ingenious in creating bloated abdomens or delicate wings. As they gathered together to examine the results one boy whispered, "Why does this lesson go so quickly?" Another boy: "Maybe because we enjoy it so much?" With most Year 11 boys, this would have been ironic. The warmth and generosity with which they evaluated each other's work soon dispelled this thought.

129. The assessment processes are very thorough and leave the pupils in no doubt about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Lessons are less successful when the teacher is a little over-optimistic about what the least able can

achieve but these occasions are rare. Mostly, teachers will break down difficult tasks into manageable pieces.

130. The main strength of the good curriculum is the solid basis of observational drawing and the limited use of second-hand sources. Pupils are taught how to enhance their drawing skills with a broad range of media and the pupils explore different art traditions, from Indian fabrics to the abstraction of Henry Moore. The approach is sometimes overly intellectual, which does prove a bit difficult for less able pupils at times. On the other hand the development of speaking and writing skills is very good. Pupils are not allowed to transcribe written work directly from the Internet, and in lessons are expected to address the class in clear sentences. Teachers provide very good support for pupils who find homework difficult and there are after-school activities for gifted pupils. The school has very good links with the local art community: the vocational students will soon be working 'in the field' with an artist who makes life-size cows with willow. The introduction of the applied GCSE art course is a direct result of reassessing the needs of boys and the lowest attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11. The very practical nature of the course has been an important factor in the success so far.
131. The leadership in art and design is very good and the department is very well managed. The caring and committed leader is a practising artist who has built a strong team of energetic and talented teachers. Their strength lies in the shared practices and complementary skills. The very good mentoring of the newly qualified and trainee teachers has also ensured a shared commitment to inclusion and the raising of standards. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Music technology makes a significant contribution to learning and achievement in Years 10 and 11.
- Effective assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress lead to good achievement.
- Independent learning is encouraged through self and group assessment.
- Gaps in music literacy skills are barriers to further achievement and instrumental proficiency.

Commentary

132. The results in GCSE examinations in 2003 were in line with the national average, and this standard was maintained in 2004.
133. Standards on entry to the school are below the national average. In Year 9, work seen and teachers' assessment indicate that most pupils are working at the national average and achievement is good. Pupils compose work that shows imagination and is well written, for example, in response to visual stimuli such as story or picture. They play well in ensemble, indicating good listening skills. Literacy and numeracy skills are well developed. Terminology is satisfactorily embedded, with pupils able to use words such as *texture* and *dynamic* with understanding, and charts are used to plot the melody of a piece of music. There is limited access to music technology in Years 7 to 9 to support both the learning of basic skills such as sight-reading musical notation and composition; this is a barrier particularly to the progress of lower attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others because they have extra support. Pupils with musical talents are identified but not always challenged in lessons.
134. Work seen and listened to in Years 10 and 11 is in line with the national average. Composition is very well supported by music technology and pupils are able to compose in a variety of styles. Compositions are well structured and shaped, and therefore very pleasing to the ear. Live ensemble work indicates that pupils are able to organise themselves and achieve a good level of performance. Most pupils are limited by an inability to sight-read music notation, and to find their way easily around a basic keyboard, so that they do not have instant access to the universal language of music. This is partly compensated by the very good facility in computerised music-making which allows pupils to express their ideas in some very original, sensitive and imaginative compositions. Achievement at this stage is good, particularly as a number of lower attaining pupils choose music as an option and succeed better than expected.
135. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned. Self and group assessment of performance encourages independent learning and evaluation skills. The level of challenge, expectation and encouragement engages pupils so that they make good intellectual and creative effort and achieve well as a result. However, there is not always sufficient rigour in identifying and catering for the needs of talented pupils. Assessment is secure and used well, with well-defined targets and achievable steps that lead to good achievement.

136. Leadership and management are good. There is a realistic and optimistic approach to pupils with below average attainment, in a programme which plays to their strengths in performance and creativity through music technology, and which results in good achievement. Graduate teacher trainees are well supported in this department and make a valuable contribution. Participation in extra-curricular music-making is satisfactory. The subject makes a good contribution towards the personal development of the pupils, particularly in confidence building and the ability to play sensitively in a group.
137. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Results are now in line with the national average and improving.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and management have built a very strong team committed to high standards.
- There are excellent curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to take part in sport.
- Excellent accommodation and resources enhance teaching and learning.
- Achievement is very good, mainly because teaching and learning are very good.

Commentary

138. In 2003, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were above the national average; in 2004 assessments showed that 100 per cent of boys and 99 per cent of girls had achieved a Level 5, or more - proportions that are well above the national average. In 2003 results in GCSE examinations were below the national average. In 2004 however, provisional results are above average, with girls' performance well above the national average. Also in 2004 the first year group of the BTEC First Diploma award had a 100 per cent pass rate. These results illustrate the pupils' very good achievement compared to their well below average entry level in Year 7.
139. Achievement in physical education is very good. During the inspection week, the standard of work in Year 9 was judged to be of an average standard; this shows very good achievement from the pupils' below average standards on entry. The standards of work of the GCSE groups in Year 11 are above average, particularly in the practical content of the course. A boys' soccer session illustrated average performance but good understanding of coaching and evaluating set practices. Basketball understanding and performance are above average and the movement off the ball shows insight into tactics and strategies. Trampoline skills are average but improving and the basic routines are working towards quality and control. Safety awareness is very good. A scrutiny of the pupils' written work found that low-level literacy skills hinder the pupils' progress in theory work, but ICT knowledge assists their presentation skills.
140. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Experienced staff provide monitoring and support to colleagues. The newly qualified teachers improve rapidly and the commitment shown in after-school time improves the quality of delivery and pupils' achievement. Subtle team teaching helps less experienced teachers to develop extra teaching skills. The planning and

preparation of lessons are exemplary and the organisation and registering of pupils are efficiently performed. Very little time is wasted and most lessons are rigorous and challenging. Pupils are given the opportunity to evaluate work and the impact on learning can be observed in lessons. The teaching of GCSE physical education and dance theory to the whole group in Year 9 and the GCSE groups in Years 10 and 11 is encouraging ICT skills. The teaching in the enrichment programme contributes to the literacy and numeracy learning in Years 7 and 8.

141. There is excellent leadership and management, which not only impact on the pupils in the school but also on the wider community. The partnership development manager and the school sport co-ordinator have begun the second year of promoting links with primary and secondary schools and sports clubs, and generally raising standards and opportunities for all ages. Curricular and extra-curricular time, including a breakfast club, offers a wealth of activity, which is excellently assessed via a computerised tracking system. The wide variety of examination courses has been made available or designed to cater for all abilities. The innovative curriculum is in the first year and is aimed at providing opportunities for pupils to study for GCSE or dance a year earlier and 'fast-track' the gifted and talented. Other pupils who have different abilities and learning styles are offered the BTEC First Diploma course and the Junior Sports Leaders Award course. The management of the excellent facilities helps to create valuable learning experiences for the pupils in both indoor and outdoor activities. Leadership and management are having a positive effect on pupils' self-esteem, healthy lifestyle, achievement and standards. Overall, the subject has made excellent progress since the last inspection.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Provision was sampled in business studies and leisure and tourism.

142. The first examination results for the GCSE applied **business** course were in 2004. The great majority of those entered achieved passes but few achieved higher grades. Two lessons were sampled; teaching and learning were satisfactory.
143. The first examination results for the GCSE **leisure and tourism** course were in 2004. The great majority achieved passes with over half of pass grades in the A-C range. One Year 10 lesson was sampled. Teaching and learning were excellent. Students were able to describe a local leisure organisation in terms of its products, services, and pricing. They explained the benefits of public relations and suggested alternative promotional techniques.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The focus area was citizenship; personal, social and health education was not inspected.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is very well led and managed, with a very high quality scheme of work.
- Teaching is consistently very good and therefore pupils make very good gains in their learning.

- Citizenship makes an excellent contribution to pupils' personal development.
- When citizenship is part of other lessons, teachers do not always make this clear to pupils.

Commentary

144. Pupils come into the school with standards well below average, especially in literacy. In Year 9, pupils are attaining standards near to average, and standards are also average in Year 11. This represents very good achievement, especially in Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs are fully included and are making very good progress.
145. There is consistently very good teaching in citizenship. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject, have high expectations and make lessons challenging. They have excellent behaviour management techniques and the ability to make what could be a dry concept interesting. For example, there are particularly effective starters to lessons that motivate pupils to want to learn. As a result, there is very good learning and achievement.
146. The very good scheme of work, which is excellent in Years 7 to 9, ensures that pupils have a broad knowledge and understanding of the various topics. There is very good use made of topical events. Pupils in Year 7 learn about equal opportunities and how the law protects employees. By Year 9, the subject makes a very good contribution to cultural education as pupils look at Britain as a multi-cultural society. Pupils in Year 10 are studying citizenship as part of the humanities GCSE course and have produced some very good work on the importance of work in society and the consequences of unemployment.
147. The subject makes a very good contribution to literacy as pupils learn to contribute to group and class discussions and are able to write down their opinions. Citizenship is identified in the planning of other subjects, but pupils are not always aware of this.
148. Pupils achieve very well in developing skills of participation and action as this is part of the whole ethos of the school. The part taken by pupils in community-based activities is noted in weekly planners and discussed with mentors. The newly appointed school-based youth worker is organising a community garden project, designed to raise the confidence of identified pupils and produce a pleasant feature for the school. The school council has been re-launched and two meetings have taken place. Three pupils from the school are candidates for the Kent Youth Council and they addressed some of the school during an assembly.
149. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department is enthusiastic and well informed about the subject and this is reflected in the excellent schemes of work and the very good progress of the pupils. She has referred to a recent national review of citizenship to ensure that the school is making very good progress with this new subject. There are links with a local primary school and the school has run a citizenship day, which had very good feedback from pupils.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	2	100	80.1	0	23.7	25	29.9
Biology	9	0	65.2	0	11.1	0	20.6
Classical studies	1	100	87.4	0	34.3	30	35.2
Communication studies	1	100	86.4	0	23.8	30	32
Drama	4	100	86.5	0	19.6	32.5	30.6
English	7	71.4	82.9	0	17.5	21.4	28.7
General studies	23	39.1	73.9	0	17.8	9.1	25.7
German	1	100	81.5	0	19.3	30	28.9
History	4	50	80.7	0	19.5	12.5	28.6
Mathematics	6	16.7	61.9	0	17.1	3.3	22.1
Other sciences	5	0	71.4	0	15.9	0	24.3
Other social studies	6	66.7	69.7	0	16.7	16.7	24.1
Sociology	8	12.5	71.8	0	18.4	3.8	25.4
Sports/PE studies	12	50	73.2	0	11.4	10.8	23.1

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	4	100	98.6	0.0	50.2	75	87.5
Biology	2	100	96.4	50	39.2	90	78.6
Chemistry	1	100	97.6	0	49	60	84.9
Communication studies	1	100	99.4	0	37.8	80	82.1
English	8	100	99.4	25	36.3	67.5	80.9
General studies	5	100	94.7	0	31	60	73.1

History	2	100	99	0	44.6	50	84.6
Mathematics	1	100	96.7	0	55.6	60	88.8
Other sciences	1	100	97.3	100	41.5	120	80.3
Other social studies	1	100	97.4	0	42.7	60	81.8

Level 3 VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	20	97.5	65	20	14.6	66.5	60.1
Health and social care	8	50	67.7	0	14.5	22.5	63.5
Science	2	100	44.8	0	3.7	60	58.5
Information technology VQ	12	91.7	77.9	0	23.4	45.8	64.9

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English was inspected in full. Work was sampled in media studies.

150. Results in AS-level **media studies** were well below average in 2003 but improved significantly in 2004 and were broadly average. All candidates were successful, with over a third achieving A or B grades. One lesson was seen, where teaching was very good.

English

Provision in English in the sixth form is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good; students have achieved 100 per cent success in A-level examinations in recent years.
- Teachers know their subject very well, and provide closely structured support for students.
- Students are well motivated and make a good effort in their work.
- Students do not have enough responsibility for developing their own learning and there are limited resources to support independent study.

Commentary

151. Results at AS-level in 2003 were below average, and well below at A-level, as they have been consistently in recent years. There was, however, a 100 per cent success rate at grades A-E, with 25 per cent gaining B grades. All students were successful once more at A-level in 2004, though there were no higher grade passes. AS-level results improved significantly this year. Achievement in the subject is good. Attainment

on entry to the sixth form in previous years was below average. The great majority of students reach or exceed their target grade in examinations. English is a popular choice in the sixth form. Numbers of students have increased considerably in the current Years 12 and 13 and almost all students complete their chosen course.

152. Standards of work seen during the inspection were below average. This reflects their GCSE results. However, achievement is good; most students are well motivated and make a good effort in their work. The majority contribute constructively to class discussions and are prepared to justify and explain views when challenged. The best coursework essays are mature and coherent. Students take time to refine and redraft their work, so that it represents the best of which they are capable. Writing by higher attaining students, for example in studies of character, mood and theme in 'Wuthering Heights', was informed by a sensitive personal response and well supported by detailed textual reference. The work of lower attaining students shows less capacity to evaluate style and technique, and is sometimes marred by poor expression. Coursework is well presented, however, with students making good use of word processing skills to redraft and improve their writing.
153. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are characterised by positive working relationships between staff and students. Coursework is assessed promptly, with detailed written comments that suggest targets for improvement. Teachers monitor students' progress closely and are prepared to give additional personal help and guidance where it is needed. They know their subject very well, and are able to communicate their own interest in literature effectively. This clearly enhances students' response to the subject overall. A balance between teacher input and student contribution was not always fully achieved in lessons observed, however. Teachers led most of the work and some students lacked the confidence to participate in whole-class discussion. A wider range of teaching methods could be used to create more opportunities to involve all students actively. They could also be expected to take more responsibility for developing their own learning, through wider reading and research and by taking a lead in presenting ideas in lessons. Resources in school to support independent study are limited and need to be further developed. Opportunities are taken, however, to broaden students' horizons through external visits. Recent examples include a study conference in London and theatre visits.
154. Leadership of English in the sixth form is good; management very good. Planning for the subject is detailed and thorough. Teachers collaborate closely to share good practice. New A-level and AS-level courses have been introduced successfully. The City and Guilds 'Wordwise' course and language training qualifications for students who have English as an additional language are also now offered, to meet the diverse needs of students. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

155. Standards on entry to the sixth form have been below average, but in work seen during the inspection students' communication skills were average overall. This represents good progress. Teachers provide effective support, through class discussion and development of written work in a wide range of subjects. Students reach above average standards in coursework for physical education, sociology and business studies in particular. Essays are well supported by effective research and use of

detailed evidence. The systematic approach adopted in business studies to developing understanding of technical terms and reasoned evaluation of topics is very helpful to students in presenting and exploring arguments in essays. Standards are satisfactory in mathematics and science. However, below average literacy skills in other subjects, in terms of the quality and accuracy of expression, are frequently a barrier to reaching the highest grades in AS and A-level examinations.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics in the sixth form is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are achieving well in their examination course.
- Teaching is good, and the course is well structured.
- There is no specific course to develop numeracy skills.
- There is little use of ICT to extend learning opportunities.

Commentary

156. On entry to the sixth form, standards in mathematics have been below average overall, but average for those students retaking the GCSE examination. In the 2003 AS-level examinations, standards were well below average with only one of the six candidates gaining a pass grade. Standards at GCSE level were also well below average. There were no AS-level candidates in 2004, but GCSE results showed a significant improvement with over two-thirds of the 17 candidates gaining grades B or C, well above the national average for students retaking this examination.

157. In work seen during the inspection, standards were average overall, with students with grades D or E attempting to improve their results to a grade C. The number of students retaking the GCSE examination has increased; a minority of the group have joined the course from other schools. Most of the students have a positive attitude to the work, they are clearly gaining in confidence, and they are on target to gain one of the higher grades. Overall achievement is therefore good. There is no difference in the standards of male and female students, but a minority of male students lack concentration. The attendance of a significant minority of students is erratic, leading to a lack of continuity and progression. In 2003, only half of those starting the GCSE course completed their studies.

158. Teaching and learning are good. The course is well planned, and there are clear learning objectives for each lesson. Teachers have good command of their subject, and explanations of key mathematical principles are clear. Teachers have high expectations of students, and insist on high standards of presentation. There are occasions when teachers tend to dominate lessons, leaving insufficient opportunity for students to use their initiative (as they will have to do in their examinations). There is little opportunity for students to learn by using computers. There is a satisfactory contribution to the development of students' communication skills, with good use of key words, and opportunities to contribute verbally, but few occasions require the use of full sentences.

159. Curriculum leadership and the management of mathematics are satisfactory in the sixth form. The school does not provide a key skills course to help develop numeracy skills in other subjects. Furthermore, at the time of the inspection there were no AS/A level students. However, there is good provision for students wishing to improve their GCSE grade. Since the previous inspection, there has been satisfactory improvement in sixth form provision.

Mathematics across the curriculum

160. There is no key skills course in the application of number but several subjects make significant contributions to students' mathematical development. More emphasis on the monitoring of this provision would help to ensure greater consistency in the development of key concepts, and in the use of mathematical terms. It would also provide information about whether students' mathematical skills are sufficient for them to benefit fully from the courses they are taking.

161. Particularly good contributions to the development of mathematical skills are made in business education, science (where aspects of numeracy were contained in all lessons seen), sociology, and physical education. Data is not used sufficiently in the health and social care course.

SCIENCE

A-level vocational science was the focus of the inspection. Work was sampled in GCSE human physiology and health and in GCSE science.

162. Lessons seen in **human physiology and health** and in **science** had very good and excellent teaching, with very high levels of achievement. Students' standards were below average but they were encouraged to do their best, by high expectations and personal support and encouragement.

Vocational science

Provision in vocational science in the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good and promotes good achievement.
- Students are committed to achieving their very best, and they support each other very well.
- There needs to be more regular formal assessment of students' work.
- There is very good leadership by the head of faculty.

Commentary

163. Students' results have been in line with, or better than expected, over the last three years, based on their standards at the end of Year 11. The number of examination entries is too low to be able to make statistically reliable national comparisons.

164. Standards are well below average when students embark on this course. Students in the second year of the course demonstrate standards that are in line with national averages. The achievement of male and female students is very good. Students are highly competent at carrying out scientific investigations and problem solving. They present and interpret data in a variety of ways, using well-developed skills in the application of number. Students also have well-developed ICT skills which enhance their learning. They have many opportunities to develop and practise their communication skills through a range of research activities. Some students find the spelling and use of technical terms very challenging, but this does not inhibit their ability to understand and communicate complex ideas.
165. Teaching and learning are very good. Students are highly motivated by challenging work, which is clearly presented by a teacher with very good subject knowledge. Collaborative work among students is highly effective and students are very supportive of each other. They have a wide range of opportunities to carry out independent research in the community and via the Internet, in order to investigate the use of science in the workplace. Advice, support and oral feedback are regularly given to students and they appreciate the individual attention that they receive. However, there needs to be more regular formal written feedback with clear targets for improvement, so that students are absolutely clear about what they need to do to improve still further.
166. This subject benefits from the very good leadership of the head of faculty, who rigorously monitors the quality of teaching and the standard of students' work. Virtually no students drop out of this course once they have started it, and the number of students taking the subject has increased significantly this year. This enables stimulating discussions to take place and students to share ideas and support each other. This has a positive impact on learning and achievement. This subject was not taught at the time of the last inspection in 1999 so it is not possible to comment on improvement since then.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision for ICT in the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning lead to very good achievement.
- Assessment is very good, enabling students to see clearly how they can improve.
- Access to computers and online resources is very good.
- Teachers do not always make best use of the powerful display technology.

Commentary

167. Standards in the 2003 examination were well below average when compared with standards nationally. All students achieved a grade, although none at grades A or B. Results were much improved in 2004 and are close to average.
168. Standards are below average overall on entry and students arrive from a range of different backgrounds, some not having previously studied ICT to examination level. Current standards are average and set to improve. Students in Year 12, for example, are able to produce an invoicing system for a music store, devising a range of imaginative solutions. More able students enhance their work using programming skills or more complex software. This represents very good achievement for all students. Male and female students achieve equally well. Almost all students complete their chosen course.
169. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are consistently well planned. Students are given very clear instructions on examination requirements and project planning. This is critical for these students, who have had to rapidly learn independent working and study skills in order to meet the deadlines. Teachers also take care to help students develop their level of English, which is generally below average at the start. In the best lessons, teachers insist students address the group in clear sentences when reporting their progress or answering questions. This is helping to overcome the students' inherent passivity. However, more use could be made of technology, the electronic display for example, to motivate them. The assessment processes are very thorough and leave the students in no doubt about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
170. The leadership and management of the course are very good. The leader is also responsible for ICT teaching throughout the school: decisions taken on the main school curriculum have not only created an increased demand for the advanced level course, but have also meant that students join with improved skills and higher expectations. Because the leader has built a strong team of expert teachers with broad experience, these expectations are being met with more demanding work and the commitment to raise standards even further. The vocational course itself was set up to meet the needs of sixth form students with a wide range of career ambitions, including commerce, nursing and catering. The large amount of assessment data provided by the school's system is carefully analysed. This provides a picture of the department's performance and a guide to future planning.
171. The curriculum is good. The teachers have a good understanding of the examination requirements and have set up very good online resources including course guides, self-evaluation sheets and templates. Projects are realistic system requirements and make use of the increasing sophisticated software tools available. Students have access to the computer network at all times during the school day and to the support of the teachers whenever they are available, including after school.
172. There was no advanced course in ICT at time of previous inspection so it is not possible to comment on improvement.

Sixth form competence in ICT

173. The students' competence in the use of ICT in the sixth form is average. They are able to make use of a good range of 'Office' software to produce a range of documents such as tables of data, posters, letters, multimedia presentations and World Wide Web pages. Most students can use the Internet effectively for research of all kinds. Presentation and design skills are good. Despite the very good access to the computer network that the sixth formers enjoy, the use of ICT to enhance learning in different sixth form subjects is not widespread. It is, however, used well in business and other vocational studies. The popular Pitman's course raises the standard of ICT as well as office practice skills. It also provides an additional qualification for students, whether they plan to go into employment or higher education.

HUMANITIES

Work was inspected in sociology, and government and politics was sampled.

174. A Year 12 AS-level **government and politics** lesson was seen. The quality of teaching was good and enabled pupils to discuss the electoral system in the United Kingdom, draw their own conclusions and plan for the writing of an extended report.

Sociology

Provision in sociology in the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Challenging teaching encourages real intellectual effort and commitment.
- Very good marking and assessment make a significant contribution to very good learning.
- Very good leadership and inspiration create a climate of possibility for all students.
- Students' own motivation and determination significantly boost their achievement.
- There are insufficient enrichment experiences to broaden and deepen the students' understanding.

Commentary

175. Results at A-level in 2003 were below the national average at A or B grades, but all students achieved a pass at A-E grades, which was better than expected given the students' overall GCSE results. There was an improvement in 2004.

176. Standards for students currently in Year 13 are just below the national average. Students have a sound grasp of methodology and sociological perspectives. The writing of the higher attaining students is of a high standard. They are able to source authorities and use them tellingly in their arguments, and evaluate and summarise well. Others make fewer intermediate judgements and do not link their commentary securely to the title. Literacy and numeracy skills are good, evidenced in the students' understanding and appropriate use of sociological terminology and statistics. AS-level students come to grips with the subject terminology well, but some lower attaining students struggle with the theoretical aspects. The students' work-related skills are

less well developed, because there are as yet few opportunities for enrichment experiences beyond their textbook learning. Achievement in Years 12 and 13 is very good, given the well below average starting point of these students in a new and demanding subject.

177. Teaching and learning are both very good. Lessons are well planned and teachers have high expectations, as seen in challenging questioning to which students respond with good intellectual effort. There is an assumption in teachers' approach that students will succeed, and this is translated into students' self-motivation. Assessment of students' work is very good. The marking of assignments is consistent and helpful because it really shows the students how they can improve. As a result, students make rapid progress, particularly in extended writing.
178. Leadership and management are both very good. There is a vision for the future and commitment to high standards, with a constant focus on improving teaching and learning through lesson observation and sharing of good practice. The subject makes a good contribution to personal development through the study of social behaviour and motivation. There is no judgement on improvement, as the subject was not reported on at the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Provision was not seen in this area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Work was sampled in drama.

179. A and AS-level results in **drama** are below the national average, but all students have successfully gained pass grades in both examinations for the past three years. One lesson was seen during the inspection. Teaching was very good. Standards in improvised work to create physical theatre were above average.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Work was sampled in leisure and recreation and physical education was inspected in full.

180. The AVCE course in **leisure and recreation** is offered for the first time this year. One Year 12 lesson was sampled in which teaching and learning were good; students were working individually on portfolio assignments on customer service.

Physical education

Provision in physical education in the sixth form is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and management of initiatives promote students' learning.
- The Sports College Partnership Scheme encourages wider participation in sport.
- The use of the excellent accommodation and resources, including ICT, enhances teaching and learning.
- Curriculum innovation and very good teaching have contributed to very good achievement.
- The students bring a positive attitude to the subject and they work hard.

Commentary

181. A-level physical education courses have recently been introduced in partnership with another school and are beginning to attract more students. The BTEC national certificate course is in the second year and the first results will be announced in the summer of 2005. The AS-level course results in 2003 were below average but the smaller group that continued to A-level reached a provisional average grade overall in 2004. The course is too recent to comment on retention rates.

182. Achievement is very good. By Year 13, A-level students have reached an above average standard with significant improvement from their below average grades at AS-level. They have realised that they need to be more adept at theory than previously experienced. There is an equal mix of male and female students. The quality of some of the work in the A-level group was good, including independent research and presentations to the rest of the group. The students' use of ICT was particularly good. In the BTEC national certificate course a role-play

of a health club scene was well acted out with the main points of learning being brought out by the students. There are very good relationships within the group, and this has a positive influence on learning. ICT resources and brainstorming materials were used to reinforce learning. In another group knee joints were made from cardboard rolls and elastic bands to show the function of ligaments. The students benefited from the 'hands on' approach to learning. A work scrutiny demonstrated above average written skills, including independent research, and well-designed project work.

183. Teaching and learning are very good and at times excellent. The accommodation permits a variety of ICT teaching aids, which makes learning much more interesting. Very good achievement in theory lessons was observed as resources were readily available and the teacher was prepared for all contingencies. Expert knowledge is evident in the teaching and helps to consolidate the learning when the lesson is evaluated. Teaching is relaxed yet organised efficiently and planned effectively. The atmosphere of the workroom is purposeful and friendly with very positive relationships between teacher and students. The impact on achievement is very good, particularly in the BTEC course. Work is assessed regularly and targets set so that all students are aware of their progress through the course. Work is set, marked and returned by e-mail if students so wish and any unit missed through absence can be accessed via a computer. Use of ICT to improve learning is a major teaching asset in the sixth form.
184. The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. The curriculum opportunities are further enhanced with activity sessions during the week, which involve all sixth form students and include sports leader award courses. Academies for talented athletes and rugby players have been introduced and further academies including tennis and women's soccer are planned. With the assistance of the partnership development manager, coaches from governing bodies of sport and local qualified coaches are incorporated into the schemes. A healthy lifestyle course has been arranged for female students who are not talented in sport but wish to adopt a more active and healthier approach in their lives – around 30 sixth formers attend regularly. The leadership and management are innovative, forward thinking and have appointed mainly young, enthusiastic staff to carry out a programme that encourages students of all abilities to reach their potential, improve self-esteem and be decisive in lifestyle changes. Excellent improvement has been made since the previous inspection.

BUSINESS

Provision in business studies in the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is very good because teaching methods are very well matched to their needs.
- Teachers encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and they in turn display excellent attitudes.
- There are very good links with local business and these enhance students' motivation as well as their learning and achievement.

Commentary

185. AVCE results in business in 2003 were average overall, but female candidates did significantly better than male. Results, overall, were similar in 2004 but with no significant differences by gender. A strong profile of achievement has been sustained since the last inspection with a 100 per cent pass rate each year, including higher grade passes each year.

186. Standards on entry to the course are below average. By the end of Year 13 standards are above average, representing very good achievement. Students start to investigate real businesses from the beginning of Year 12. They quickly learn to use key terminology to analyse the main features of business organisations and go on to apply theoretical tools and models to analyse business effectiveness. ICT skills develop very well, including Internet research, giving presentations and summarising data from primary research. Numeracy skills meet syllabus requirements, for example, in interpreting business financial data and linking it to decision-making. Communication skills develop very well overall through the process of research and investigation, with students bringing together information from a wide range of sources. Lower attainers are less effective in applying “textbook” knowledge to real companies. Higher attainers in particular display good evaluation skills, for example, in examining the impact of human resources on the performance of a particular company.

187. Teaching and learning are very good. Teaching methods match students’ learning needs very well. They are encouraged to check their own understanding of new terminology, to record new learning in their own words and compare their understanding with each other. This builds students’ confidence very well at the start of the course, including those who have not studied the subject previously. New ideas are re-visited in well-planned sequences of lessons, with students reminded, for example, to learn key points about consumer protection statutes by a certain date. Strong business links are established through very good planning. These make the subject real and this in turn enhances motivation, learning and achievement. Methods encourage independence and initiative and the students respond very well. Students take responsibility for their own learning by visiting local companies as part of their investigation work. In one example a student uses his part-time work placement company for his business investigation. Students know which companies locally and via the Internet provide quality information for their assignments and they therefore make informed choices for research activities. Assessment is very thorough so that students know the extent to which they are meeting grade criteria.

188. Leadership and management are very good. Leadership of the curriculum has been very effective over a long period in developing links with business. The transition to a new course with new requirements has been very well managed with a strong profile of student achievement sustained. The subject was not reported on separately at the last inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The school offers a broad range of health and childcare courses including CACHE courses and an Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) course. Provision on the AVCE course was inspected.

Vocational health and social care

The provision in vocational health and social care in the sixth form is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attitudes to their work are good.
- Activities are not always well related to practical situations and students' experiences.

Commentary

189. The numbers on the course are too small to make any accurate judgements about standards or trends. The course is too new to judge retention rates. Health and social care is one of the lowest performing vocational subjects. Nevertheless, students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their entry levels. For example, two students have recently arrived from countries overseas with little previous knowledge. Reading ages of the majority of students are well below their chronological ages and written source material is difficult for them to access. A significant minority of students have weak spelling and do not systematically use spelling aids when word-processing. They are not confident about using specialist vocabulary but participate well in discussion. The achievement of students from minority ethnic families and those with additional learning needs is similar to that of others. The subject attracts no male students.

190. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Long-term planning is in place for separate units of work. Students feel well supported through regular mentoring. Case studies are effectively used to promote understanding. The students benefit from specialist input and this provides insight into the work of care practitioners. Teachers provide positive reinforcement of the care values through their interactions. Issues related to stereotyping are addressed and students are encouraged to reflect on their own communication and behaviour in order to improve their performance in care settings. The higher attaining students use appropriate terminology, but those with weak literacy skills find some of the terminology very difficult. Work is marked helpfully and guidance shows students how to improve the quality of their work. Lessons provide insufficient opportunities for independent work. There are too few opportunities for students to find, evaluate and draw conclusions from evidence from different sources. There is limited use of ICT. The range of care settings within which students might develop their skills is limited by constraints beyond the school.

191. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There are frequent and regular meetings to develop the course and students have appropriate textbooks. There are too few strategies for supporting students' weak literacy skills and for developing their independence through, for example, making Powerpoint presentations and analysing data. Health and social care was not reported in detail in the previous report.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

This provision was not inspected.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4);

unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).