

INSPECTION REPORT

THE CHERWELL SCHOOL

Oxford

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123151

Headteacher: Jill Judson

Lead inspector: Graham Preston

Dates of inspection: 7th-11th February 2005

Inspection number: 268957

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1691
School address:	Marston Ferry Road Oxford Oxfordshire
Postcode:	OX2 7EE
Telephone number:	01865 558719
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mike Gotch
Date of previous inspection:	Not applicable

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Cherwell School has recently expanded to become an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school following local reorganisation that ended the previous system of middle and upper schools. The integration of over 800 younger students, with 45 additional teaching staff, has created a much larger than average school of nearly 1700 students. It is a split site school consisting of the original upper school and one of the previous middle schools. The large sixth form of over 400 students has steadily grown and includes a significant number of outside applicants who previously attended local state and private schools. As this is considered a new school, no judgement will be made in this report on progress since previous inspections. Reference may be made to progress made over recent years.

Overall, Cherwell's students are from above average socio-economic backgrounds. The majority are children from higher socio-economic groups, including those professional occupations closely associated with the universities in the city. Even so, the school has a significant number of students from less advantaged backgrounds and this is reflected in those claiming free school meals, which is about the national average. About two thirds of students have white UK backgrounds with the rest having widely different cultural and ethnic origins which is above the national average. Of these, a significant proportion are children of overseas staff employed in the education and business sectors. A few students with refugee status attend the school. About 15 percent of students have English as an additional language but only about 24 students are at an early stage of English language acquisition.

About 14 percent of students have special educational needs, which is similar to the national average and include those who attend the hearing impaired and autism units based on the school site. Over three percent of students have statements of need including those from the specialist units. The majority of students start in Year 7 with above average standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. A greater than average proportion of these are gifted and talented.

The school has recently become a specialist science college reflecting its strength in that subject area, particularly in the sixth form. In developing its specialist college role it has increasingly wider links with local schools and the community. It is also in the process of gaining Artsmark status

acknowledging its considerable provision for music, drama and visual arts. The school is fully involved in initial teacher training and works closely with local university education departments.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1990	Graham Preston	Lead inspector	
32697	David Smith	Lay inspector	
33535	Joanna Jones	Team inspector	English 11-16
18178	Ian Matthews	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-16
32785	Win Allt	Team inspector	Science 11-16
32231	Adrian Lyons	Team inspector	Information and communication technology 11-16
32367	Jo Pike	Team inspector	Art and design 11-18
32861	Gaynor Hartle	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-16
33150	Angela Pilgrim	Team inspector	Geography 11-18
10817	George Rayner	Team inspector	History 11-18
2496	Tony O'Sullivan	Team inspector	French 11-18, German 11-16, English as an additional language
33082	David Thomas	Team inspector	Music 11-16
23307	Neil McDonough	Team inspector	Physical education 11-18
27226	Richard Cribb	Team inspector	Religious education 11-16, special educational needs
34019	Karen Kerridge	Team inspector	Sixth form economics, work related learning
3242	Mike Newman	Team inspector	Sixth form chemistry, biology and psychology
2652	Robin Lomas	Team inspector	Special educational needs units
22423	Jon Lovgreen	Team inspector	Sixth form English and theatre studies
18072	Joan Stephens	Team inspector	Sixth form mathematics
29742	Patricia Fyans	Team inspector	Sixth form physics

34089	Robin Gaff	Team inspector	Citizenship 11-16, Spanish 11-16
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The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The Cherwell is a good school with many strengths including a very good sixth form. Very good leadership of the headteacher has enabled the school to maintain its high standards during the recent school amalgamation and expansion. Good teaching enables students to learn and achieve well. Very good extracurricular provision, including excellent activities in performing and visual arts, considerably enriches the good curriculum. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- The headteacher is well supported by very committed key staff and an active governing body
- A significant amount of very good and excellent teaching enables students to achieve well and very well for those in the sixth form
- Students like coming to school because of the intellectual challenge they receive and they value the cultural and ethnic diversity of their peers
- Very good whole-school provision for special educational needs enables these students to make very good progress
- Strong provision in science, particularly in the sixth form, has helped the school make good progress in its development as a specialist science college
- Academic monitoring and target-setting systems are not yet fully operational, which inhibits the otherwise good efforts to support students' progress; assessment and marking practice is also inconsistent across the school
- Student behaviour and punctuality in some lessons, falls short of the generally good standards and reflects a lack of consistency in staff expectations in the now much larger school
- The significant management of time and resources needed to support the use of split site accommodation is resulting in other initiatives taking longer to be implemented

Cherwell is a new school and, as such, has no previous report on which to base improvement judgements. It has, however, made good progress since its reorganisation and has tackled issues which were previously known to need attention. Statutory requirements in religious education are now fully met and the extracurricular activities, previously seen as lacking, are now a strength of the school.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Students achieve well in Years 7-11, reaching above average standards by Year 9 and well above average at GCSE. Standards in the sixth form are well above the national average and reflect very good student progress and achievement. Students come to the school with standards overall above the national average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and make good progress. Mathematics and science are strong, with students gaining well above average national test results at the end of Year 9. English is showing recent improvement to match more closely the standards of the other core subjects. Students achieve very well in GCSE history, art and design and physical education and achievement in all other subjects is good. Cherwell is consistently one of the best performing comprehensive schools in the county in terms of the amount of progress students make during their time at the school.

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A	A	A	B

Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	A	A	A	
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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 students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Students’ personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good as are their attitudes and behaviour. Students like school and value the social and cultural diversity it provides. Their desire to learn is reflected in their active involvement in many lessons. Attendance is good and most students behave well around the school. Student behaviour and punctuality in some lessons falls short of the generally good standards. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good and is well supported by effective provision for citizenship. Students’ cultural development is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. The good curriculum covers statutory requirements and more practical and vocational courses are gradually being introduced to meet better the needs of all students. Whole-school provision for special educational needs students is very good, including the support in special units. A very good range of extracurricular activities provides stimulus and challenge, with excellent work in drama and music. The care system is supportive, though academic monitoring of students is not yet fully developed. Links with parents and the community are good and very good with schools, colleges and universities. This reflects the school’s effective work as a specialist science college and a major contributor to teacher training. **The overall quality of teaching is good** and very good in the sixth form. In almost all subjects the teaching is good. Positive relationships and teachers’ enthusiasm and subject knowledge in most areas result in students developing effective learning skills. The school is working effectively to build cohesive subject teams in the much larger, split site school though consistency in expectations, particularly in marking and assessment, has still to be fully established.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides very good leadership. She has a very clear vision for the school and has been very successful in building very good working relationships to cope with the school reorganisation and in creating a shared commitment for improvement. The leadership team provides effective support for the many middle managers, who are hardworking and committed. Overall school management is generally good, though with the split site and much larger subject teams, some systems are still being developed. Governance of the school is good. The dedicated and very well informed governors are very supportive of the school and they have ensured that all statutory requirements are met except that for a daily act of collective worship. Financial efficiency is very good but the lack of specific funding to support the use of split site accommodation adds to the complexities of budget management.

PARENTS’ AND STUDENTS’ VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have very high expectations of the school and readily express their views. They appreciate the many strengths of the school though have some justifiable concerns about consistency of marking and homework. Students appreciate the quality of teaching and being treated largely as responsible learners. Students feel that rare incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are

- Ensure that whole school systems of assessing students on entry to the school, tracking their progress and establishing targets for improvement, are fully developed

- Make marking and assessment practice consistent in all subject areas, to inform students of their progress against national standards and give clear guidance for improvement
- Ensure that all staff manage behaviour and punctuality consistently and effectively
- Work with the local education authority to ensure that funding for the complexities of split site provision is adequate

and in the sixth form

- Extend the curriculum provision to include suitable courses for students of all abilities

and to meet statutory requirements

- Provide a daily act of collective worship

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

The Cherwell School makes very good provision for sixth form students. Around one third of the students are from other local schools and have chosen to attend the school because of its good reputation and provision for A levels. The sixth form is well led and the very good teaching enables students to achieve very well. Examination results are well above the national average. The sixth form is very cost-effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are

- Very good teaching challenges students and develops their intellectual skills and abilities very effectively
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good and a strong 'culture for learning' has been developed
- Students appreciate the social and cultural diversity of the school and the way it is actively promoted
- Pastoral support for students is very good as is individual support for learning; systems for wider monitoring of academic achievement are underdeveloped
- With a move to a more open access policy, the curriculum does not fully meet the needs of some of the students that the school is accepting into the sixth form

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 sixth form subjects were inspected in depth. In the sampled subjects, teaching and achievement were very good in music, German and Spanish, and good in business studies, English language and literature combined, further maths, ICT, media studies, the AS courses in 'Public Understanding of Science' and religious education.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	English literature: Very good. Students appreciate the stimulating teaching by knowledgeable teachers which enables them to reach well above average standards. Theatre Studies: Very good. Teaching is energetic and imaginative and students achieve very well as a result. They benefit from an extensive range of extracurricular opportunities. French: Very good. Skilful and enthusiastic teaching promotes very good learning and high standards.
Mathematics	Mathematics: Very good. Well qualified teachers with very good subject knowledge ensure well above average standards.
Science	Biology: Very good. Achievement, teaching and learning are very good and the subject is characterised by a high level of support for students. Student attitudes are very good. Chemistry: Very good. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding are excellent. Student attitudes to learning, and their achievement, are very good. Physics: Very good. Very good teaching challenges students intellectually. They make very good progress and achieve well above average exam results. Psychology: Good. Achievement, teaching and learning are good and the subject is characterised by a high level of student interest.
Information and communication technology	No focus subject in this area

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Humanities	Geography: Good. Standards are above average because most teaching is very effective. Occasionally the pace of lessons is slower and students are not challenged sufficiently. History: Very good. Very knowledgeable and well planned teaching and very good student attitudes lead to very good achievement.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	No focus subject in this area
Visual and performing arts and media	Art and design: Very good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to give extremely effective individual support which enables students to achieve very well.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Physical education: Very good. Teachers are extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Students have very positive attitudes and they achieve very well.
Business	Economics: Very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge which challenges students' thinking and leads to high A level results.
Personal development and general programmes	No focus subject in this area

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

The school provides a wide range of effective support for students through its tutorial system and the subject teachers. Students are keenly aware that they will receive appropriate support and guidance from their teachers. This gives them considerable confidence in the school. The majority of Year 13 students go on to higher education and they receive comprehensive advice and information from teachers. Progress is monitored well within subjects and the school takes effective action to support students who fall behind for any reason. Currently the school is working to establish systems for setting students' target grades, based on their GCSE performance, that would help students better understand their progress.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership, management and governance of the sixth form are good. The vision for the future of the growing sixth form is reflected in the excellent work done to induct students and ensure they are well integrated into the sixth form community. The range of enhancement opportunities through visits and events is also very strong. The GCE A level course options are well organized, though the staff have tended to permit some students to pursue courses they are not sufficiently prepared for. Other management aspects such as academic monitoring and target setting are still developing but overall, good leadership has resulted in a vibrant community actively engaged in high quality learning.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students generally have justifiably high regard for the sixth form provision and their teachers. They describe the school as being 'warm and welcoming'. Most are enthusiastic about their work and the way that the teachers communicate their enthusiasm for subjects. A few are rather casual about arriving punctually for lessons.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Students achieve well in Years 7-11 and very well in the sixth form. Overall standards at GCSE are well above the national average and compare favourably with schools whose students have similar primary school attainment. Sixth form standards are similarly well above national average, reflecting very good achievement by most of those students.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in all subjects and very well in some, reflecting the school's standing as consistently one of the most successful schools in the county
- Students make good progress in English, science and mathematics, particularly in Years 7-9; the achievement in English is a recent improvement, due to good teaching and learning
- A small but significant proportion of students do not do well at GCSE, so the school offers more practical and applied courses in which they can succeed
- Sixth form achievement is very good for the great majority of students; the school's readiness to accept some students with modest GCSE results onto its largely academic courses results in a number being less successful, though still achieving well from their starting point

Commentary

1. Students come to the school with above average standards overall in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The range of ability is very wide, with many gifted and talented students as well as a considerable number of students with special educational needs. Among the latter are students who are hearing impaired and others who are autistic. These students also attend the specialist local authority units based at the school. Overall standards across the three core subjects are well above the national average when students reach Year 9. This reflects good progress and achievement.
2. End of Year 9 English tests in 2004 showed that students had reached above average standards indicating that they made satisfactory rather than good progress in their first three years in school. However, the work of the English staff in developing writing skills and matching learning to different students' needs, has helped raise standards in Years 7-9. Consequently, most students are now making similarly good progress to that found in the other core subjects. Even so, extended writing and greater independent reading is still less developed than it could be for higher attaining students. Literacy generally, is good in many other subject areas. Students use technical language with increasing confidence and are often impressively articulate in discussion and other oral classwork.
3. Students make good progress in mathematics in Years 7-9 and reached well above national average standards in the 2004 Year 9 National Curriculum tests. All students make equally good progress, whatever their abilities. Higher attaining students in Year 8 are able to use ICT effectively in presenting linear equations graphically while in Year 9, special educational needs students are coping well with initial work in algebra. This overall competence in use of number is evident in other curriculum areas such as science with work on ratios, while in design and technology students measure and calculate accurately.
4. Standards in the 2004 Year 9 National Curriculum science tests were well above national average, reflecting good student progress. Students often have a very good understanding of scientific concepts. The particular teaching and learning approaches used in Years 7 and 8 help them develop their practical and problem-solving skills. Students with special

educational needs also make good progress, particularly when supported by the well trained teaching assistants.

- Standards across other subjects by the end of Year 9 are mostly above average although some variation is explained by differences in students' subject competence on entry to the school. In many of the foundation subjects, including humanities and ICT, students start in Cherwell with standards close to those expected. In design and technology and art, students start with levels below the national expectation. Achievement is good in all subjects.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.3 (33.9)	NA (33.4)
mathematics	38.0 (39.9)	NA (35.4)
science	35.6 (37.6)	NA (33.6)

There were 264 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Standards and students' achievement in Years 10-11 build on the picture found in Years 7-9. GCSE results as a whole, are consistently well above the national average, reflected in the high proportion of students gaining five or more grades A*-C shown in the table below. The comparative measures used by the school and the local education authority, show that students' progress indicated by a 'value added' measure is good over Years 7-11 and in most years including 2004, Cherwell was the "most successful Oxfordshire school" in terms of student progress.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	71 (67)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95 (86)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (95)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	41.9 (39.1)	34.9 (34.7)

There were 239 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- In terms of science and mathematics, students in Years 10-11 largely sustain the good progress they made in Years 7-9. In English, students achieve very well and make up for the slower pace of progress in their earlier years, to match the well above average GCSE standards of the other two core subjects.
- In other GCSE courses, students' progress is good or better. In physical education, art and design and history, students make very good progress and achieve very well. Much of this can be attributed to high quality teaching that motivates the many talented students. Standards in history are particularly high, reflecting the higher level analytical skills many students develop.
- The difference between girls' and boys' performance in most GCSE subjects is less than that found nationally. In the school, boys perform as well as girls in a number of subjects, including English and French, though girls do significantly better than boys in German and Spanish.
- The multicultural aspect of the school is enhanced by the presence of many students for whom English is not their mother tongue, whose parents, often professional, are now working in Britain. Currently, 24 of these are at an early stage of English. They benefit from specialist support from a visiting teacher and generally achieve well. Most students for

whom English is an additional language integrate well into mainstream lessons with little obvious additional support. Where necessary, good additional support is provided and this was evident in mathematics and art lessons seen in Year 7, where those students made good progress.

11. The achievement of the vast majority of students with special educational needs is very good. In addition to good teaching, this results from the very good individual education plans (IEPs) and strategy support documents that help staff provide a very good level of support in lessons, and good work in the learning support and behaviour support units. A further factor is the specialist support provided by non-school staff in the autistic and hearing impaired units based on the school site.
12. The school identified a small group of students who were disaffected or had special educational needs or both, that underachieved in 2003 because courses did not suit them. It has tried to provide a wider range of more practical and vocational courses to match the needs of similar students more closely. More recent results have shown improvement indicated in the better five or more GCSE grades A*-G rate in 2004, though the needs of those students remain a school priority.

Sixth form

13. Overall standards at GCE A level are well above national average and these have been sustained in each of the last three years. Standards on entry are above that for sixth forms nationally though not as high as might be expected given the school's own GCSE results. This is because about a third of the sixth form come from other local state and private schools and the school has been prepared to accept some of these students with more modest GCSE results.
14. The inspection looked at thirteen of the sixth form courses in depth and the picture was almost uniformly very good. In all the sciences, modern foreign languages, mathematics, English and other subjects, standards seen were well above national average. Teaching and other provision were very good. The lack of well-established whole school baseline assessment and target setting made it more difficult for the school to demonstrate clearly how well students had progressed. However, in almost all subjects seen, the students were considered to be progressing and achieving very well based on their levels of understanding and skills.

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2004

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	95.1 (94.8)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	47.7 (46.1)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	323.9 (333.7)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 191 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

15. The 2004 results in some subjects were not as high as the overall sixth form average. These include design and technology, geography, ICT and psychology. The proportion of lower attaining students is greater in these subjects. In reaching national average standards, these students have made good progress and personally achieved well.
16. One qualification of an otherwise very positive picture is the lower success rates at GCE AS level in a number of subjects, including sciences, where a few students also continue to A level with limited success. Student achievement is still very good in the sixth form and even these students gain some qualifications that reflect good achievement. However, the school acknowledges that these students would make even better progress if it could provide viable applied and vocational courses.

17. Students identified as having special educational needs are usually intellectually able though require support in other ways, such as with hearing impairment. Those students seen in Year 12 achieved very well because of the expert support they received.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance in the main school and sixth form is good and punctuality is satisfactory. Students' attitudes to school and behaviour are good and are very good in the sixth form. Students' personal development, including spiritual, moral and social aspects, is good. Their cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships between students and teachers and other adults in school are good and this helps students to develop into very confident and enthusiastic young people
- Students enjoy using their initiative and the majority work hard and do their best
- Although most of the students are sensible and polite, a few are too casual in following school rules
- Procedures for promoting attendance are good but a small number of students are not as punctual as they should be

Commentary

18. Students trust their teachers and feel valued as individuals. They get along well with each other and adults and they enjoy the time they spend at school. Teaching provides a high level of intellectual challenge. Students find this very stimulating and they develop a strong desire to learn and succeed. Students particularly appreciate the way that teachers are always willing to give up their time in order to help with any personal or academic problems. Within this supportive atmosphere, students become increasingly self-assured and their strong commitment to their studies makes a major contribution to high standards of work seen during the inspection.
19. Students make good use of the many opportunities for them to take an active role in the day-to-day life of the school. For example, they run the school council and recently helped to revise the Cherwell code of conduct. They also organise fundraising events and provide good support for local and national charities. Students enjoy taking part in the very good range of extra-curricular clubs and the performing and visual arts are proving to be especially popular.
20. Most of the students show great self-discipline and are very responsible. They respect the school's system of rewards and sanctions and say that their teachers are fair. Students share a strong sense of purpose and their good behaviour has a positive effect on the standard of their work. They are confident, articulate and polite to each other and to visitors.
21. The school has taken and continues to take effective action to tackle the issue, recognised in the past, of the unsatisfactory behaviour of some students, which impacts upon the learning of others. Measures include behaviour support and developing more appropriate course provision. The school still has a number of poorly motivated students but the situation is much improved. The great majority of students are committed to their education, though some can be casual in following school rules such as restricted use of mobile phones and portable stereos. On occasion, a few display an overconfidence that borders on arrogance and shows in a lack of sensitivity and respect for others, including teachers.
22. In the pre-inspection survey of students, about half thought that some misbehaviour and even bullying did occur though few students recognised this as a particular problem and agreed that the school dealt with any such issues very firmly. Inspectors agree with their positive views and the school's effective procedures are reflected in the low level of fixed period and permanent exclusions. Racist incidents are also very rare.

Ethnic background of students

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

Exclusions in the last school year

No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1155	48	1
8		
101		
27	3	
5		
38	1	
44		
25	1	
65	1	

Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	15		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	27		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	12	2	1
Black or Black British – African	38	1	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	6		
Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
Chinese	41		
Any other ethnic group	30	2	
No ethnic group recorded	53	1	

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

Attendance

23. Improved monitoring procedures have helped the school to reduce the number of unauthorised absences over the past few years and overall attendance is now above the national average. Teachers vary, however, in the extent to which they challenge students who arrive late to their lessons. Although only a few students are involved, their poor time-keeping means that they may miss part, if not all, of their teacher’s introduction. This adversely affects their progress, as well as interrupting the learning of their classmates.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.1	School data	1.2
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

24. Students develop self-knowledge and spiritual awareness through assemblies, although the school does not meet the requirement for a daily collective act of worship. In an effective assembly on the theme of festivals, students were given the opportunity for reflection while listening to a recording of Gregorian chant, and were encouraged to celebrate and learn from festivals relating to cultures other than their own. Religious education and a number of other subjects contribute very well to students’ spiritual development. For example, all students in a Year 8 lesson were engrossed by a moving account of the Last Supper, while a Year 11 music lesson stressed the emotional impact on listeners of flamenco singing.
25. Students’ moral development is fostered effectively in a number of ways. The school promotes religious, racial and other forms of equality in assemblies and tutor group periods, and through lessons in a range of subjects. They enjoy many opportunities for responsible social action, for example in taking part in the charity fundraising organized by year councils, through community linked citizenship projects in Year 11, and through the school’s peer listening scheme. This programme is valued not only by younger students who are able to express their concerns to a sympathetic listener, but also by the sixth form students who offer the service.
26. Cultural development is very good. Many subject areas contribute to this. In art, for example, students encounter a wide range of artefacts from around the world, and are able to discuss the work of controversial art and artists with considerable maturity. Students’ appreciation of a poem in a Year 10 English lesson was enhanced by the teacher’s use of authentic Pakistani items of costume and jewellery. In German, a teacher brought to life a lesson relating to shrovetide festivals by wearing traditional dress, including a carnival

mask. Students gain first-hand knowledge of other cultures through exchanges and visits, including a trip to the Somme organised most recently by the English department, and through events such as the Year 9 “Japan Day” which featured activities led by members of the local Japanese community.

Sixth form

27. Students’ attitudes and behaviour are very good. Around two thirds of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form and are joined by students from other schools. This reflects students’ strong commitment to learning and very positive attitudes towards school. The wide range of GCE A level courses available is much appreciated and students feel these match their career aspirations well.
28. In discussions they speak highly of their teachers and the efforts made to make lessons interesting and challenging. These very positive attitudes are reflected in their regular attendance and application in lessons. Students’ readiness to get to lessons promptly is not so evident, though is generally satisfactory.
29. Students play a very active part in many aspects of school life, organising and participating in musical and other events. They are also well regarded for their work in mentoring Year 7 students, helping in lessons and providing support in some of the local primary schools. Overall, they serve as very good role models and work closely with the younger students, although the split site limits the opportunities to meet and mix with those students as much as they would want.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. The good curriculum covers statutory requirements and the developing practical and vocational courses are better meeting the needs of 11-16 students. Whole-school provision for special educational needs students is very good. A very good range of extra-curricular activities provides stimulus and challenge with excellent work in drama and music. The effective care system is supportive, though academic monitoring of students is still in its early stages. Students’ views are well canvassed and valued. Links with parents and the community are good and very good with schools, colleges and universities. This reflects the school’s effective work as a specialist science college and major contributor to teacher training.

Teaching and learning

In almost all subjects the teaching is at least good. It is good overall and very good in the sixth form. Nearly a third of teaching and learning observed was very good or excellent in the main school and the proportion was nearly two thirds in sixth form lessons.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The high level of specialist knowledge of most teachers engages and intellectually challenges students, particularly in the GCE A level courses in the sixth form
- Most teachers have a personal enthusiasm for their subject and use it well to establish very good classroom relationships
- Much of the teaching and support for students with special educational needs are very good
- Teachers set high expectations and most lessons are well planned with varied activities
- A minority of lessons have less clearly identified learning outcomes and materials are insufficiently varied to meet the needs of all students
- Marking and assessment practice is not yet consistent across all departments

Commentary

30. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7-11. The table below is an aggregate of all lessons including those in the sixth form.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 205 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (3.5%)	78 (38%)	78 (38%)	42 (20%)	1 (0.5%)	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.

31. What characterised a number of excellent lessons were the creative and imaginative tasks that enthused and challenged students. This was seen in a Year 10 music lesson on Serialism that used exciting practical learning activities. Also, a higher attaining 'fast track' GCSE French group, exhibited high levels of language skill because of the dynamic, varied and fast-paced teaching. Excellent teaching in a Year 8 rugby lesson enthused students and, through carefully planned activities, developed students' high level performance skills. These lessons and others contained highly committed students who were increasingly able to work independently. This was because they had a clear idea of learning outcomes and were given activities that required them to research, collaborate and problem-solve.
32. The combination of very good specialist knowledge, personal enthusiasm and detailed and varied lesson planning, was a feature of most good and very good lessons. Consequently, students were sufficiently engaged and challenged, particularly when materials were well matched to their current competence levels. Question and answer was also used effectively to build on prior knowledge. This was evident in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, where completed homework was used to develop further students' understanding of gradients.
33. About a quarter of the lessons seen were satisfactory, reflecting generally competent and well-informed teaching without some of the flair and challenge found elsewhere. The great majority of students come ready to learn though a few disaffected children need, and generally receive, appropriate classroom management. More commonly, some teachers were less confident in handling often enthusiastic and precocious students who readily participated in lessons but, when not managed well, were over-talkative and distracted others. Even so, only one instance of unsatisfactory teaching was observed.
34. Other relative weaknesses, besides class management, in otherwise satisfactory teaching, largely relate to lesson planning. Some lessons do not follow the current school initiative to implement fully the national strategy for more structured and varied teaching. Consequently some dull lessons are rather teacher-directed and limited to textbook and worksheet activities. Teachers do not share with the students what learning outcomes are wanted so lessons initially lack direction. Others do not vary the level of learning materials sufficiently to accommodate the often very wide range of abilities in some classes or vary the activities to sustain student interest and good lesson pace.
35. The teaching of students with special educational needs is generally very good. This was particularly seen in the learning support units, behaviour support bases and alternative education programmes such as ASDAN. The expertise of the teaching and support staff is very well used. In the most effective subject lessons, a range of very good support strategies, based on support notes and IEPs, results in students being fully involved in their learning and making very good progress. The excellent preparation work by the German department, outlining in detail what the teacher assistant's support role would be, enabled the special educational needs students in those language lessons to progress very well. However, the quality of tasks to match the needs of such students is not always consistent and the support notes

are not always used, particularly when teacher assistants are not available in the lessons.

36. For students at an early stage of learning English, the specialist teaching provides good in-class, withdrawal and small group support depending on individual need. Students have good individual plans and targets and their progress is regularly and effectively monitored with a full annual review.
37. Marking and assessment are satisfactory and are being further improved, though practice tends to vary in quality and approach in each subject area. Significant progress has been made with the central collection of information on student progress and capability and all teachers have access to this information. Whilst individual students are now being informed of attainment targets at certain times during the year, the use of this data to plan lessons or to influence teaching is not widespread. Some teachers mark students' work very constructively and use their own assessment of classes to plan next steps for all ability groups.
38. Some subjects, including English and history, have developed their own good assessment systems so that students know grades and targets. Other subjects have made some improvements over recent years that have proved sufficient, at least at GCSE level. However, the overall use of data by teachers in planning teaching, the knowledge of targets by students and the advice given to them by staff on how to reach those targets, is very patchy.

Sixth form

39. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are very good. During the inspection, nine out of ten lessons were good and nearly two thirds were very good or better.
40. Different types of excellent teaching were seen in chemistry and theatre studies. In chemistry, the teacher made very effective use of ICT to build on students' theoretical understanding and then allow students the scope to arrive at a solution independently. In a theatre studies lesson, the very demanding warm-up activity immediately engaged students and established the high pace and sharp focus for the rest of the time. This established group cohesiveness and enabled the development of higher level drama skills.
41. Overall, the strengths in teaching and learning found elsewhere in the school are even more evident in the sixth form. Staff are very well informed both of their subjects and examination requirements and this enables nearly half of all students to reach the highest A/B grades. Students praise the quality of teaching they receive. Teachers display a clear enthusiasm for their subjects and a readiness to plan varied lessons carefully. Consequently most lessons contain a mix of activities, many of which involve the students in their own learning through presentation, group work and discussion. This sustains interest, encourages intellectual development and helps students work with greater independence.
42. Where teaching was satisfactory, lessons tended to be over long lectures with 'guess what the teacher is thinking' type questions. Usually well informed and greeted respectfully by the students, they nevertheless lacked excitement and challenge.
43. Special educational needs students are relatively few in the sixth form because of the nature of the courses. Those students may have particular needs, though most are able to cope with academic demands. The school endeavours to ensure that students are supported and they are generally well taught and learn very well. The very good support seen in history for example, enabled these students to work effectively alongside their peers and achieve extremely well.
44. Day-to-day assessment of students' work in the sixth form is good and students get generally good advice in most subjects on how to improve. The school has had a central information system collecting the GCSE grades of all students when they enter the sixth form and the data has been distributed to staff. However, this information has not been used as rigorously as it could be for evaluating student progress and setting targets. This is about to change when the school fully

incorporates the information from the 'ALIS' system used by many sixth forms for target setting based on students' GCSE results.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good overall. Students follow a broad and balanced curriculum, which provides a range of opportunities. The school has gained wide benefits from specialist science status. The breadth of enrichment and extra-curricular activities provide very good opportunities for further personal development. Resources, staffing and accommodation are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is regularly reviewed so that it can be adapted to meet the needs of all students
- Extra curricular provision is very good and provides a range of opportunities for social and academic enhancement
- A very good range of academic courses is provided in the sixth form, supplemented well by an enrichment programme
- The choice of courses in the sixth form is not wide enough to meet all the needs of all students
- The nature of the accommodation on a split site results in some unevenness between departments

Commentary

45. Curriculum provision is good overall and contributes well to students' achievement. A regular bi-annual review of provision has extended the courses available to students to help meet changing needs. A range of vocational courses, such as ICT, health and social care, sports, ASDAN and applied business, extend the opportunities for students in Years 10 and 11. In addition to these courses, valuable links with a local college provide more specifically vocational and work-related opportunities.
46. Students with special educational needs have very good access to a curriculum appropriate to their needs. A very effective programme supports students' reading, writing, understanding and study skills in Years 7 and 8. The options programme ensures special educational needs students are not generally disadvantaged in their public examination courses. The ASDAN qualification and work-related courses in Years 10 and 11 are well suited to the needs of many special educational needs students. The behaviour support unit provides very well for students who are unable to cope in mainstream education or who are at risk of exclusion, by giving them a curriculum appropriate to their needs. This often involves work experience placements and shortened timetables.
47. Opportunities for gifted and talented students are offered through a beneficial range of special curricular and enrichment activities. For example a group of students in Year 11 is able to take AS French. As indicated below, the specialist science status of the school has enabled other enhancements.
48. The school offers a comprehensive range of activities to enrich the teaching and learning across all subjects. The school has taken on board issues noted in the previous upper school and developed provision substantially, with more student involvement. The school offers a wide range of visits, trips and residencies in this country and abroad. The physical education department gives many opportunities for social and competitive sports participation. Performing arts offer an excellent programme of activities, which involve large numbers of students. In music, time commitments restrict students from continuous participation throughout the year. This is addressed through flexible planning, offering activities on a seasonal basis and complementing other opportunities provided outside the

school by the county music service and many societies in the city. The 'showcases' for musicals are very popular where outstanding talent is celebrated.

49. The school has regular assemblies, but does not provide a daily act of collective worship.
50. Cherwell achieved specialist science college status in 2003. This has enabled smaller classes to be set up in Years 7 to 11. The school has invested heavily in data projectors to support teaching and these are also available in mathematics and other subject areas. Old laboratories have been refurbished and new ones set up. The additional funding associated with this has also been used to provide a huge range of enrichment activities for students of all abilities. As a result, students can study an additional GCSE in astronomy and Year 11 students receive additional support after school to boost their GCSE grades. Links with local schools and the community are also well established and used effectively for curriculum cooperation in the sciences and other subjects as well as for secondary school induction and arts activities.
51. Overall, the school has successfully increased the number of staff to meet the needs of the larger school. Generally the match of staff to subject expertise is good, though some non-specialists teach in a number of shortage subject areas. The school has provided high quality and ongoing staff development to enable them to teach effectively within these curriculum areas.
52. Accommodation and resources are good overall. In general, the school has successfully managed the reorganisation and made best use of the accommodation, though differences in quality remain between the two sites. For example, the north site has better specialist facilities for history, whereas the south site, housing Years 7-9 has new science accommodation. Each laboratory has a data projector, there are two sets of books for each class and the rooms have been furnished to a good standard. Overall accommodation is good within the special education needs department, geography, mathematics and ICT. It is unsatisfactory for business studies because the one teaching room is insufficient for student numbers. There is no base to teach the vocational business course. In several subjects, access to ICT is limited. Generally though, resources are good across the school, particularly in the provision of good quality textbooks.
53. On becoming what is effectively a split site school separated by a fairly busy road, there is a need to have a range of resources and specialist accommodation on both sites. Despite this, the school is not recognised as a split site school and this has implications for effective use of funding.

Sixth form

54. The sixth form has grown rapidly and attracts a high number of Year 12 students from elsewhere. The curriculum concentrates on delivering a wide range of AS and A level courses and co-operative arrangements with a neighbouring college extend the provision further. All Year 12 students follow a complementary studies course, which incorporates religious education and enhances their personal development, and are able to take general studies at examination level in Years 12-13.

55. Despite the considerable strengths in the academic curriculum, the nature of the courses provided does not suit the full ability range of students accepted into the sixth form. This leads to some students not achieving as well as others in examination courses, though they still do well considering their starting points. Courses where assessment recognises students' practical, organisational and other skills, often seen in vocational courses, are rather limited. Access to post 16 courses for students with special educational needs, including those with physical impairment, is very well supported.
56. Accommodation for private study is limited. Newly refurbished study rooms adjacent to the library are a good facility but are insufficient for the numbers of students. The sixth form social area is also limited in size for the number in the sixth form.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety is good. The support, advice and guidance students receive is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Involvement through seeking and acting on students' views is good throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good induction procedures help Year 7 and Year 12 students to settle quickly
- Students receive good guidance when making option choices at the end of Years 9 and 11
- Health and safety and child protection arrangements are effective
- Academic monitoring is not fully and consistently embedded across the school
- The school actively seeks students' views and acts upon them whenever possible
- Whole-school arrangements provide very good support for special educational needs students

Commentary

57. Induction procedures are very well planned and students speak highly of the way they were eased into the school's routines and helped to make new friends. Accompanied by Year 7 students who have previously transferred, teachers visit contributing primary schools to tell Year 6 students about their new school. Regular visits, many with an emphasis on science, also help staff and students get to know each other. A number of schools contribute only one or two students. The school holds an annual 'Singles Day' so that these individuals can start to make friends before they actually transfer. Many Year 6 students undertake bridging modules in English, mathematics and science and these help to smooth their transition from primary to secondary school.
58. Teachers provide students with comprehensive information about the courses they can follow in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Very good links with local colleges, education centres and businesses significantly enrich the curriculum and students' breadth of experience. Students can also explore their options by attending informative careers fairs and through work experience placements. A dedicated team of well-qualified teachers advises students on the most appropriate options. The quality of their advice is reflected in the students' examination success and the low drop-out rates from the various courses.
59. The school is still developing its systems that support students in both their academic and personal development and to this end has more recently appointed key stage co-ordinators to support pastoral heads and coordinate arrangements for Years 7-9 and Years 10-11 respectively. Pastoral support staff work hard to get to know students in the larger school and, in general, the school has maintained good systems of care, support and guidance. Tutors and heads of year use their knowledge of students well and are quick to recognise individual needs. As a result, emerging concerns are quickly picked up and dealt with sensitively.

60. Child protection and medical procedures are comprehensive. Procedures for ensuring students' health and safety are effective and members of staff and governors have a good understanding of their individual responsibilities. This ensures that students are well looked after during the school day.
61. Analysis of the pre-inspection questionnaire shows that four out of five students are pleased with the way the school seeks and responds to their suggestions. During discussions, students say they can express their views freely through the year councils and the whole school executive council. Meetings occur at least six times a year and council members provide regular feedback to their tutor groups. Recent issues discussed have included additional seating for the south site and lunchtime arrangements and activities for north site students. The school also listens to the views of students through individual discussions with staff and through regular surveys. As a result, students are confident that they can influence the future development of their school and that their views are incorporated into plans whenever possible.
62. The needs of students with special educational needs are very well known to the school. IEPs are very well designed and available to all teaching and support staff. The links with the numerous feeder schools are very well developed and provide very good support for these students entering and progressing on from the school. It is not unusual for the school to have representation at reviews of Year 5 students from the feeder schools, so that their needs are well known and planned for long before they transfer. Similarly, there are very strong links with local support services, such as the educational psychologist, school nurse and a trained counsellor.
63. The specialist teacher for students at an early stage of English language acquisition has developed a supportive relationship with students. In addition to specialist diagnostic assessment, students are referred by teachers for specialist support. The teacher is available to assist with welfare issues and adopts a mentoring role with older students.
64. Monitoring of students' academic progress is satisfactory though the school recognises this is in need of further improvement. The school has recently established a centralised and very comprehensive data system, which is readily available to all teaching staff. Latest national test results, recent teacher assessments, and predictions for future national tests and examinations are now included for each student in Years 7 - 11, for each subject. Data are still incomplete for some older students as a legacy of the reorganisation. The use of the data to set up a whole school system for academic monitoring and target setting has still to be established across all the different subject areas. Training is scheduled for later this academic year to enable teachers to analyse and use students' test results and previous assessments, in order to be able to set targets for individual students.

Sixth form

65. The sixth form induction process is very good and students, including many from outside, quickly feel part of the school. The school does give honest and informed advice about further education though the strong desire of some students to join the sixth form sometimes clouds the need to make the right course choice. The school errs in favour of giving students every opportunity to succeed but this does mean that some struggle on inappropriate courses.
66. Students feel that systems support them very well and individual teachers are helpful, both in the tutorial system and as subject staff. Given the consistently high sixth form results, academic guidance and support has clearly been effective for most students. The monitoring and recording of students' progress based on the use of target grades are a comparative weakness. The school has not yet fully developed a system for evaluating achievement although the school is about to adopt a nationally popular system for this. This should help the school in its efforts to match students to courses more effectively.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has good links with parents and the community. Links with other schools and colleges are very good.

Main strengths

- Extensive links with other schools and colleges, particularly in the school's role as a specialist science college, enrich the curriculum and students' achievement
- Strong links with the community and local businesses support students' personal development well
- Parents receive good information about the school and the progress their child is making
- The school actively seeks parents' views and responds quickly if they have any suggestions or concerns

Commentary

67. The school's status as a specialist science college creates many opportunities to engage and interest students, parents and the wider community. Strong curricular links with primary schools help to ensure that students are very well prepared for their transfer at the end of Year 6. As a long-standing and active member of a local consortium, the school liaises closely with four other secondary schools and the local college of further education. Individual departments have also fostered close links with other schools. For example, teachers within the business studies and drama departments collaborate with colleagues at other schools within the consortium and science teachers help with teaching at another school. Strong links with other secondary schools and the local college of further education help to ensure that students are in a good position to decide what they want to do after Year 11. Sporting links are extensive and students regularly and successfully compete in a wide range of sports at local and regional level.
68. The school works closely with local businesses and has a strong relationship with a number of organisations including a multi-national car manufacturer and a prestigious publishing company. Local businesses support the Young Enterprise venture, the work experience programme, and representatives visit the school to talk to students about their jobs and careers options. As part of their citizenship coursework, all Year 11 students also undertake a diverse range of voluntary work in the local community.
69. In collaboration with a community association and the local university, the school runs a Saturday morning homework club and has provided several laptops and workbooks to help students with their work. Local police officers are also regular visitors to the school. They provide informal advice, help during some lessons and provided support for the recent successful drug awareness day.
70. The local community make good use of the school and evening courses are run as part of the district's Community Adult Learning initiative. The school now has use of a shared kiln, bought as a result of this venture.
71. Parents are very interested in their children's education and they encourage them to work hard and do their best. Annual parents' consultation meetings are very well attended and members of staff will always make time to see individual parents if they have any specific concerns. At the pre-inspection meeting, parents' views on the quality of information provided were mixed. Parents who completed the questionnaire, however, were much more positive. Inspectors feel that the quality of information compares well with other schools.
72. The school provides good information on its work through regular newsletters and booklets contain useful information on the courses available in Years 10 and 11. The website provides a valuable and accessible resource to parents and their children. In addition, parents receive an annual report as well as termly progress reviews and these keep them up to date with their children's targets and the progress they are making.
73. The school is keen to engage in a constructive partnership with parents and actively seeks their views when planning for the future. For example, parents have been involved in the recent review of the Cherwell code of conduct and have provided feedback on the structure of their children's annual reports. As well as raising funds, the Cherwell School Association provides a useful forum for discussion. The school has also canvassed parents' views about the possible introduction of school uniform and is abiding by their preference for Cherwell to remain a non-uniform school. There is an effective procedure for dealing with suggestion or concerns and four out of five parents say that the school is approachable.

Sixth form

74. Links with other schools, colleges and universities are very good. Participation in the consortium allows students to choose from a range of courses and qualifications provided

by member schools and the local college of further education. Senior members of staff also benefit from these links as they provide a useful forum for professional discussions. Students from leading universities and colleges visit to give talks and discuss life in higher education. The school's careers programme also has links with a wide range of universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. As most students move on to higher education, this prepares students well for life after school.

75. Students participate in voluntary community projects, in primary schools and a local residential home for the elderly. These activities provide valuable practical support for the schemes involved, contribute to students' coursework and promote their development as responsible citizens.
76. Links with external support agencies and the parents of statemented students are very well maintained. This enables individuals to continue their studies with full support.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are good. The very good leadership of the headteacher has facilitated the effective transformation from upper to secondary school. Senior staff lead well and management is good. Governance is good. Governors know the school very well and have ensured compliance with almost all statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has a very clear vision for an inclusive and very successful school and is able to inspire others to share these aspirations
- The effective work of senior and middle managers has enabled the school to reorganise successfully
- The governors are very knowledgeable about the school and strongly support the headteacher in her goals
- Sixth form leadership and management are good, particularly in the very effective pastoral support for students
- The school manages the split site as efficiently as it can but the additional resources and time needed for this has affected the speed at which new systems can be established across the whole school
- The leadership and management of special educational needs are good, in spite of some lack of clarity in accountability for students based in the specialist units

Commentary

77. The headteacher's vision for the school is inspirational and she is fully committed to maintaining high standards. Her vision has been very effectively shared with governors, the senior management team, staff and parents. Over the last two years, a new school has been created with the addition of Years 7 and 8 and the corresponding increase in staffing. The running of an additional site has added to the complexity of management and meant that initiatives take longer to implement than they might in a straightforward situation. The headteacher is passionate in her belief that every student has the right to be successful, and many examples can be cited where students have benefited from the inclusive nature of the school. Parents and students believe that the school is well run.
78. The headteacher and leadership team have ensured that the new school opened on time and that standards were maintained or improved during the transition. The school development plan is a very good document, which is focused on achievement and reflects the aims and goals of the school. Senior managers work well together as a team. They are very knowledgeable about their particular areas of responsibility and have been carefully

positioned to make the most of their individual strengths. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have the capacity to improve further.

79. Middle managers lead by example and their leadership is good overall. They have all responded to the challenge of leading teams based on two sites but some have been more successful than others. Some departments have established very good processes for team building such as the weekly English departmental lunch. The staffing of ICT by teachers with a wide set of other commitments has increased the challenge of building a cohesive team. The school takes seriously the demands of workforce reform. The continuing development of staff is seen as a high priority. It provides opportunities for staff to extend their own professional expertise as well as being focused on school priorities.

80. Governors are very well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use their wide range of expertise effectively in contributing to strategic decisions, such as the new school's ethos statement. They see their role as constructive friends in questioning and challenging decisions, but recognise that they need to play a more critical role and be involved at an earlier stage in school development. Governors' links with subjects are not fully effective in monitoring the school's performance rigorously. Governors have not ensured that the school meets the statutory requirement for providing a daily act of collective worship.
81. Performance management for teaching and non-teaching staff is good with a well-established timetable for target setting and review. The induction of new staff is very good. The introductory programme provides a good framework for development, which is enhanced by lesson observations, sharing of good practice and school-based research that all new teachers carry out. Continuing professional development is very good. It is closely linked to the needs of the school. Good links with local universities mean that staff can use school-based research as credit for higher degrees. Research findings are used to generate school improvement and staff expertise is used as a resource for school-based training. The school's contribution to initial teacher training is very good.
82. The experience and previous success of the headteacher combined with drive of governors and staff to build on what is already an effective school have resulted in very good and honest self-evaluation procedures. These are helping the school in its realistic though challenging school improvement planning.
83. Leadership and management of special educational needs work in the school is good, shared by both learning and behaviour bases as well as the different subject areas. Day-to-day management is very good. IEPs are very well written to support students' progress. All statutory requirements are fully met. The links to feeder schools are very strong. The very good work of the teacher assistants ensures that students are able to achieve very well, often above their classmates. The specialist units for autism and hearing impairment are a strength that has improved the provision for special educational needs greatly. There is now a clear focus of the learning support department's work and a high commitment to continuing development, which incorporates the administrators and teaching assistants very well. However, although assessment is good, the analysis of results does not sufficiently show what the support adds to each student's progress. The lack of clarity over the responsibility for monitoring the progress of students attached to the on-site specialist units, but working within school based lessons, has made the analysis of their progress inconsistent.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	6,458,852	Balance from previous year	241,617
Total expenditure	6,328,000	Balance carried forward to the next	197,000
Expenditure per student	3,766		

84. Financial management is very good. Financial resources are well targeted to support planned developments. The apparently high balances carried forward are fully accounted for in terms of capital and other expenditure made during the school year but after the end of the financial year. Every opportunity is taken to reduce expenditure through negotiation to achieve best value for money. Through its continual self-evaluation, challenge and rigorous systems, the school is demonstrating, very effectively, the implementation of best value principles.
85. A certain amount of frustration ensues from the fact that the school does not receive the extra funding normally given for split site accommodation, yet the Cherwell sites cannot

function as well as they do without extra resources and management time. This impacts on the time and finances available for other management tasks.

Sixth form

86. The leadership and management of the sixth form is shared across a number of key staff, including senior managers. Leadership and management are good. A major strength is the very good management of pastoral support including a very effective induction programme, which is highly regarded by the students.
87. The commitment of managers and teaching staff to ensuring students' progress is high and goes a long way to offsetting the relative weakness in whole-school approaches to academic monitoring and target setting. The school is also appreciated for its open sixth form in giving students with modest GCSE grades every opportunity to pursue GCE A levels. These students are valued and well supported. The school is well aware of the need to provide, and encourage students to take, more applied and vocational courses.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning

Overall provision in work-related learning is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Work experience is well established
- The school has very good links with local industry and business
- The curriculum supports work-related learning well through a wide variety of different courses
- While the college link course contributes well to work-related learning the mismatch of college and school timetables means that students miss school lessons

Commentary

88. The effectiveness of work-related learning programmes is good. Students achieve well on a variety of learning programmes, including the ASDAN Youth award and NVQ programmes. An increasing variety of applied GCSEs is also being offered by the school. Achievement on those sampled, such as business, was satisfactory.
89. Work experience is well established in school, all students take part in a one-week work experience placement. Students are well prepared for their work placement and fully debriefed afterwards to maximise the time spent out of class.
90. The school has extensive links with local businesses, which include internationally renowned car manufacturers, retailers and banks. This enhances students' classroom learning in applied GCSE courses by linking it to realistic work contexts.
91. The school links with the local college to provide a wide range of vocational programmes in Years 10 and 11. These programmes are managed well and students benefit from their college experiences. Although the benefits considerably outweigh any drawbacks, the college link students coming back into school have to fit into the normal school timetable rather than one designed for them that is coordinated with the college provision. This means they miss certain lessons which affects their progress in some subjects.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' knowledge and planning contribute to high standards, particularly in Years 10-11
- Assessment and analysis of data are precise and well focused on raising students' attainment
- Students' extended writing and independent reading are improving but are not quite as good as students' other skills, particularly in Years 7-9
- Very good leadership and management have resulted in the creation of a very effective teaching team

Commentary

Examination results

92. Standards rose from 2003 to 2004 as measured by the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, which were above average in 2004. This is due to the department's precise analysis of disappointing results in 2003, following which teachers targeted the improvement of writing at sentence and paragraph level. Girls' test results were higher than boys' in 2004.
93. GCSE results are well above average as they have been in recent years, indicating very good progress. In 2004, high proportions of students gained grades A* - C in English and English literature with boys' performance improving and close to that of the girls'. Almost 3 out of 10 students gained A* or A grades.

Standards and achievement

94. Work seen during the inspection showed that standards are continuing to improve in Years 7-9 due to well-planned lessons, which are often prepared at three different levels, so that all students can achieve equally well. Overall, pupils have achieved well over their first three years at secondary school. In a Year 7 lesson, the teacher modelled a piece of writing on the board and students were able to describe the difference between simple and compound sentences and use these to good effect in their own writing. In a Year 8 news-reporting topic, students used topical material from that morning's newspapers captured on an ICT presentation, to analyse the effect of a photographic image of an agonised face. Further discussion of textual conventions enabled all students to create their own headlines and paragraphs. Although most students are able to articulate ideas in class, much of their writing is less sophisticated and lacks fluency. The department have identified this as an area for development, with assistance from the local education authority, and have begun to

focus on moving raising the National Curriculum levels students attain. There was less evidence of extended writing or independent reading in the work of more able students.

95. Students achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 and standards are well above average. The department has successfully worked to improve the performance of boys over recent years and also ensured that students with special educational needs are well supported in class. In a Year 10 lesson, a teacher extended students' understanding of a poem from other traditions and cultures by using an example from Pakistan as a stimulus. Year 11 students were able to express complex thoughts, with precise vocabulary, for example when describing the term 'scavenger' as a 'pejorative way of saying stealing', in answer to the teacher's probing questions.

Teaching and learning

96. The quality of teaching and learning are good and often very good. Teachers have good relationships with students and behaviour is generally managed well. Teachers are subject specialists who teach literary analysis with expertise. For example, Year 11 students analysed the way a film director built suspense by changing from humorous to threatening moments, and used clever editing, which cut between scenes, to emphasise a sense of danger. Written response to literature in GCSE coursework folders had a strong personal voice and interpretation of text. The department is developing assessment for learning, as reflected in improved marking and clear guidance to students on how to improve work. The use of ICT is at an early but exciting stage of development and Year 8 students working on a unit of work on biography could access stored ICT presentations, and other computer resources, and save the work to their own area on the school network.

Leadership and management

97. Very good leadership, particularly successful in leading a large team of teachers through a process of reorganisation, has established a collaborative approach to aiming at high standards. A very good departmental ethos has been created through professional development of staff, mutual respect and a sharing of professional expertise.
98. Management is very good. Very effective teamwork is based on reflection of practice and evaluation of student achievement. Information gained from monitoring, assessment and analysis of results has identified areas for development and potential underachievement. Contributions to departmental policies made by staff are valued. The development of teachers' use of ICT, in creating an area on the school network where resources can be efficiently shared, has overcome difficulties of working on two school sites. The department provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities that enriches students' experiences and is a strong feature of the school's provision.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

99. Students enter the school with literacy skills that are above average. Students with weak literacy skills receive well-organised, additional support. Examples of good practice were observed in many departments and, overall, the level of competence is well above that found nationally with outstanding speaking skills. In geography, history and English, examples of extended, well-focused writing are evident. Students are able to write in a variety of styles because there is a good focus on grammar and understanding of how language works. However, writing is more competent in Years 10-13 than in Years 7-9. In music and design and technology, students are able to use sophisticated and technical language in discussions, and key words are regularly emphasised in physical education.

Modern foreign languages

From 2003, students have studied German or Spanish in Year 7 and begun French as a second foreign language in Year 8. French is the first foreign language for students currently in Years 9-11.

Provision in modern foreign languages is good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Very good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The well-planned curriculum and its innovative features allow students of all abilities to achieve well
- Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11; in other years there is some inconsistency in French and Spanish
- While overall student progress is good there has been some variation between different foreign languages in recent years
- The large department works as a cohesive team because of very good leadership and management

Commentary

French

Examination results

100. GCSE results in 2004 were well above the national average for boys and girls. Boys attained nearly double the national proportion of grades A* to C. These results continued a trend of recent years.

Standards and achievement

101. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. Students speak with confidence and produce very good extended writing on topics such as their past or ideal holidays and the cinema. Students in the “fast-track” Year 10 group, who are sitting GCSE this year and AS level next, are achieving very well, showing excellent spoken French skills in dramatised role-play. In Years 8 and 9, students’ achievement is less consistent. Progress in different groups in Year 9 varies from very good to satisfactory and the late start in Year 8 has not promoted accelerated learning sufficiently.

German

Examination results

102. GCSE results in 2004 were above the national average. Girls did significantly better than boys. Results overall were below 2003 figures.

Standards and achievement

103. In the current Year 11, standards are above average. In a lesson observed, students made rapid progress developing their knowledge of the environment. Their written work is of good quality. Year 10 students achieved very well presenting short, television-style cookery shows on the theme of healthy eating. They used a good range of language with spontaneity and humour. In a Year 8 lesson, focused on the past tense, students made good progress with particularly good reinforcement of new learning through a range of activities. Overall progress in German is good in all years.

Spanish

Examination results

104. GCSE results in 2004 were in line with the national average. Boys performed in line with the average, but girls did rather better. However, students did less well in Spanish than in their other subjects, notably other languages. Results in 2003 had been significantly better.

Standards and achievement

105. In the current Year 11, standards are above average. Students use their listening, speaking and writing skills well in combination and are achieving very well. Very good achievement was also seen in Year 8, where students enthusiastically tackled a new topic – food.

Elsewhere, achievement and progress were less consistent – students progress less well in Spanish in Years 7 to 9 than in other languages.

Teaching and learning

106. Teaching is best in Years 10 and 11, where it ranged from good to excellent. In Years 7 to 9 it ranged from very good to one instance of unsatisfactory practice. There is a clear issue of lack of consistency in these years. The best features of the predominantly good teaching were lively and engaging presentation with extensive use of French, German or Spanish; very good use of resources including ICT for presentation of key structures; fast and motivating pace; very good collaboration between teachers and language assistants; the promotion of strategies for improving learning; lessons planned to meet the needs of different ability groups and support and encouragement for students. In a Year 7 German lesson, students were introduced, topically, to the tradition of Carnival in Germany and Austria. Teaching was less effective when behaviour was not well managed, leading to underachievement, when the pace of lessons was too slow and when students were not sufficiently challenged. Assessment and marking are good.
107. Dynamic teaching of the Year 10 “fast track” French group produced a lively and positive response. Older students responded and learned well when teaching focused them on examination techniques. Younger students were motivated by active approaches to learning, which engaged and involved them. By contrast, when teaching did not engage them, they misbehaved and underachieved. Students with special educational needs make good progress as the curriculum is planned to meet their needs. A very good example of in-class support was seen in Year 7 German.

Leadership and management of modern foreign languages

108. The department is currently under temporary leadership, which is proving very effective. The three heads of languages work with the department leadership as a cohesive, mutually supportive team. The department is very well managed, with extensive documentation and innovative curriculum planning which has produced linguistic diversity and the “fast track” initiative. The curriculum is still not always sufficiently challenging in Years 7 to 9 but extra-curricular provision is very good, with exchanges to France and Germany and a study visit to Spain. The three foreign language assistants are very effectively used to enrich students’ experience.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work and results in examinations are well above average and students achieve well because of the well-informed, specialist teaching
- Teachers are developing good strategies for helping students learn, though some practice limits the extent to which students are actively involved in lessons
- The recent school reorganisation has slowed efforts to create a cohesive team with shared approaches to teaching and assessment

Commentary

Examination results

109. When students join the school, their attainment is above average. At the end of Year 9, results in national tests were well above average in 2004 and above average compared with students from similar schools. Over time, the improvement in results has exceeded the national improvement, although there was some slight slippage in 2004. The difference between boys' and girls' results is very similar to the national differences. Mathematics results were better than those in English and science. Results in GCSE in 2004 were well above average and reflect a consistently good pattern of well above average results over time. Overall, the achievement of students from Year 7 to the end of Year 11 is very good.

Standards and achievement

110. Standards of work seen up to the end of Year 9 are well above average and show that students achieve well. This applies to all students. For example, a class of students in Year 9 with special educational needs was able to work with good understanding and high concentration on some basic work in algebra. Another higher attaining group in Year 8 was working very well using ICT to demonstrate the link between the equation of a line and its graph. In both instances, this was good achievement. By the end of Year 11 students have made further progress and standards remain well above average. Very high standards were seen in one group working on the 'gradient function' – work approaching A level standard. Overall student achievement was good.
111. The behaviour and attitudes of students in all lessons was good. Even on the small number of occasions when students were less cooperative, good support from teacher assistants and good teaching quickly brought those students back on track.

Teaching and learning

112. Teaching and learning are good overall, although slightly better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11, mainly due to the wider range of teaching techniques being used. Teachers time-limit activities and provide a number of different types of activity, often beginning with fast-paced starters which make very good use of the new data projectors. Work is challenging and provides a range of material to suit the different needs of students in the class. For example, in a class working on linear graphs in Year 8, the teacher had included extension material on quadratic graphs for immediate use for those students who quickly grasped the basic ideas and who needed to move on. Weaker teaching was often associated with too much teacher direction, or where the teacher talked for too long before getting the students to work independently. Individual teachers make good use of assessment during the lesson and there were examples of good marking, which included good guidance to students on how to improve. Teachers do not follow a common approach, however and instances of ineffective marking were seen.

Leadership and management

113. The impact of the reorganisation and associated difficulties in assimilating staff from different schools, together with difficulties in recruitment, have caused some barriers to development. Good leadership and management have maintained standards and done the best with the resources available. However, the new enlarged size of the school does not have a sufficient number of delegated posts to allow for management of what is now a very large team of teachers being as efficient as possible. The split site is potentially difficult for both staff and students, but the very well-designed ICT system where teachers can save lessons on the central system and then call up those lessons from any room, is very effective at mitigating the effects of the unavoidable movement of staff between sites. Teachers have informal mechanisms for sharing ideas and resources, but systematic analysis of teaching based on a programme of monitoring and evaluation has not yet been established. The collection of data is improving and some good use is being made of it to set student targets in some years. Generally, data is not yet well used to monitor and compare the results of different individuals and groups of students.

Mathematics across the curriculum

114. The overall competence of students in mathematics is well above average and students are able to apply their mathematical skills successfully across many subjects. Very competent work was seen in science, where students were using ratios, and in design and technology, where a range of skills were being used, such as scaling and appreciating the need for accuracy of measurement and calculations.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is very good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are encouraged to develop their thinking skills and apply them to all their work in science
- Teachers make very good use of resources to support teaching and learning
- Teachers have high expectations for good behaviour and use a variety of activities to keep students focused at all times
- A wide range of enrichment activities stimulates student enthusiasm and supports science lessons in Years 7 to 11
- Although student tracking systems are in place, marking is inconsistent and students are not given sufficient guidance in their written work about how they can improve

Commentary

Examination results

115. Students scientific skills and understanding are above average when they start in Year 7. Results at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average in 2004, and very high when compared with their prior attainment. Girls performed better than boys. The average point score was well above the national average, although lower than in 2003. GCSE results for 2004 were well above the national average with girls and boys reaching similar standards when averaged across the whole ability range. Although fewer students achieved grades A* to C, when compared to 2003, there was a significant increase in the number achieving the higher A*/A grades in 2004.

Standards and achievement

116. Standards of work seen in Years 7 to 11 are well above the national average overall. Achievement is high because, in most lessons, students are focused throughout and well supported by their teachers. Students have a very good understanding of scientific concepts. Their thinking skills have been developed through active, problem-solving lessons in Years 7 and 8. Less able students make good progress because they are well supported by teaching assistants who have been well trained. Year 7 to 9 students are able to make measurements with precision. They have a good understanding of biological concepts and can, for example, identify location of chromosomes, identify traits and understand implications of cross breeding. Year 7 students can identify fossil fuels, how they are formed and their uses. In Years 10 and 11, students apply their scientific knowledge to investigations, which are well presented and include graphical interpretations with full critical evaluations. In Years 7 to 11 students have well-developed mathematical skills. Students of all abilities are able to analyse data on planets and present it graphically and make accurate calculations from their measurements.

Teaching and learning

117. The pace of most science lessons is fast and the time available is used effectively. Teachers make very good use of resources to support their teaching. This includes multimedia simulations, for example animations showing the formation of fossil fuels, and imaginative worksheets which ensure curriculum coverage at all levels. This ensures that students of all abilities make good progress. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and most are well matched to their classes. They know their students well and have a good relationship with them, identifying and supporting their individual needs. Teaching styles are adapted to suit student needs. These range from energetic

presentations, fired with infectious enthusiasm, to the calm and patient approach seen in classes for less able students. Well-established routines to support effective learning are embedded in the best lessons and the teachers' expectation of a high standard of behaviour is clear and subtly re-enforced. At the beginning of lessons students are given tasks to focus their attention on learning. One of the most successful of these stimulated an awareness of the impact of over-consumption in developed countries on global warming and developing economies. These tasks are a successful way of provoking questioning and answering and strengthening the understanding of scientific concepts. In most lessons students respond actively and all students are encouraged by praise to reply. Good safety procedures are in place during practical lessons, ensuring that students work in a safe environment.

Leadership and management

118. A management structure across the two sites is clearly defined, with good communication amongst all managers via a newsletter. A well-structured curriculum package is in place. Schemes of work are well established and there is a very clear vision by the leadership, with very good role models amongst the senior members of the department. Staffing is very good and staff are deployed well, according to their skills. Although student progress tracking systems are in place, monitoring of how students are informed of ways to improve their work is not rigorous enough. Not all written work is marked thoroughly and constructively. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Enrichment, community links and links with local schools are very good and associated with the specialist science school status. The special status has also enabled an improvement in accommodation and resources, which have had an impact on students' achievement, particularly in GCSE results.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and Learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Satisfactory	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and much improved planning is leading to rising standards and good achievement for all
- Effective leadership continues to bring about improvement but, with different teachers contributing to ICT, it is difficult to establish a cohesive team
- The use of ICT by teachers to enliven lessons is good but opportunities for students to use ICT to support their learning in other subjects is less well developed
- Class activities are not sufficiently varied to address the needs of different learners

Commentary

Examination Results

119. All students in Years 10-11 take either a short course GCSE (equivalent to half a GCSE), or a GNVQ (equivalent to 4 GCSEs). In 2004, results in both courses were well above the national average.

Standards and achievement

120. Standards seen during the inspection in Year 11 were above course expectations. Standards on entry are average and, although there is some variation in teaching quality, overall progress by students is good. Students in Year 9 for example, are able to write instructions for a simulated ride at a funfair while in Year 8 most students can apply

formulae to a spreadsheet to calculate the best mobile phone tariff for different users. By Year 11 students following the GNVQ course are able to use a wide range of applications and apply them for business use such as designing a website for a mobile phone shop or creating a usable data base for a garage.

Teaching and learning

121. In Years 7-9 students benefit from the school's involvement in a national strategy to improve teaching and learning in ICT. Sufficiently well-structured lessons lead to students learning about ICT in a systematic way and covering the requirements of the National Curriculum. Relationships are good and teachers have good classroom management skills, which lead to productive lessons. However, some teachers lack the confidence to try out new ideas and vary learning materials to meet the needs of the most and least able. When students with special educational needs and the most experienced and competent users of ICT were each given identical tasks, the progress of some students was limited to how quickly the teacher could get around the class while very competent users quickly finished their work. In both instances students achieved less than they could have done.
122. In Year 10-11, students are well supported in their individual work and work well independently although occasionally the tasks lack sufficient challenge. In the GNVQ group, students are very clear about what they need to do to pass and get higher grades and they benefit from good feedback and respond well. In the GCSE course also, most students are clear about these factors but motivation is sometimes less good. In all year groups, where teaching assistants are available they support learning well but their use is too infrequent.

Leadership and management

123. The leadership of ICT is good but management procedures are not as effective. A clear vision for the subject and its development is shared between the school and departmental leadership. There has been substantial change with the introduction of the national strategy for Years 7-9. The availability of an examination course for all students in Years 10-11 is also a good development. However, the disparate nature of staffing, with most of the department having loyalties and commitments elsewhere, has militated against the formation of a cohesive team. Technical support staff make a valuable contribution. Where teaching assistants work in ICT lessons, they are allocated to support individual students rather than ICT learning.

ICT across the curriculum

124. Satisfactory provision is made for the use of ICT across the curriculum. The number of computers in the school is around the national average for secondary schools. In English, good resources have been placed on the network but students use these more in Years 7-9 than in Years 10-11. In mathematics examples were seen of data projectors being used well by teachers. A good range of resources and planned activities involves ICT in history while in geography the use of ICT to produce GCSE coursework helps students to achieve well. However, overall ICT is used more by teachers to enliven lessons than by students to improve learning. Students' competence is above average.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A good learning atmosphere results from teachers' use of effective behaviour management strategies
- Teachers' good knowledge of the examination requirements help students' progress
- ICT is used effectively to aid learning
- The department's improved assessment techniques are not consistently applied
- Where lessons are not so well planned, or work is not set at different levels, lessons lack challenge

Commentary

Examination results

125. The 2003 and 2004 GCSE results were above the national average. In 2003, boys and girls performed similarly, while boys did noticeably better than girls in 2004.

Standards and achievement

126. Students arrive at the start of Year 7 with an average range of geographical skills and knowledge and by Year 9, standards of work are currently above average. They make this good progress and achieve well because of the well-planned teaching. Students in Year 8 can annotate and use diagrams to explain physical processes such as volcanic eruptions. They can use research material to explain how environments, such as the tropical rainforest, affect people and how people affect environments. Year 9 students can compare places; for example they can explain the geography of Japan and make comparisons with Britain. The performance of girls is better than that of boys. Students with special educational needs also progress well because they are given individual help.
127. Students continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11, where computers are used particularly well to support the learning of the less motivated students. Both boys and girls reach a good standard in coursework because of their good use of computers to carry out research and present their work.

Teaching and learning

128. Overall, from Years 7 to 11, teaching and learning are good. The best teaching is characterised by very good lesson planning with varied and imaginative tasks, which interest the students. In these lessons, probing, persistent questioning by the teacher effectively challenges the more able. The work of teaching assistants is well organised so that students with special educational needs take a full part in the lessons. Discipline is good because teachers are effective in their use of non-confrontational behaviour management strategies. Computers are used effectively to support learning. For GCSE, the school intranet is used to provide common reference information and to give all students a basis for fieldwork reports.
129. Teachers are very well informed about GCSE examinations and teaching is carefully planned to meet the requirements of the examination syllabus. The department is developing assessment for learning techniques and, when used, they enable teachers to focus on teaching and learning; consequently these students make good progress. However use of these techniques is inconsistent and some students lack clear guidelines on how to improve their work. Where lessons are not so well planned, or varied to meet different student needs, lessons lack challenge and students learn less.

Leadership and management

130. Leadership has a very clear idea of how the department is to develop and how to get there. An effective team has been created, which is happy to work together and to share ideas. The changes made are well thought out and events, such as the Japan day, provide a very good stimulus for learning. Management is good. Communications are very good and the department is well organised. However the schemes of work are not yet fully in place and monitoring needs to be more coherent so that teaching and learning are more consistent.

History

Provision in history is very good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 and very positive student responses, contribute strongly to success in the GCSE examination
- Assessment makes a very strong contribution to learning, although marking is unsatisfactory in a few groups in Years 7 to 9
- Very effective leadership and management have ensured that the subject has continued to be successful over a considerable period

Commentary

Examination results

131. The 2004 GCSE results were well above average. Overall, the achievement that students showed in history results was higher than for any other subject in the school. This was true for students with all levels of attainment, but the highest attaining students did particularly well, securing a much greater proportion of A*/A grades than in most schools. Results have been consistently at similar levels over recent years. A much higher proportion of students choose to study history than in most schools.

Standards and achievement

132. Most students enter the school with average standards in history. By Year 9, the great majority improve to a level above the expected standard. For example, in some good imaginative reconstruction of conditions in the First World War trenches, most show a considerable knowledge of the nature of the fighting and an understanding of the consequences for those who experienced it. In Years 10 and 11 standards improve strongly to become well above average for most students, with a substantial minority approaching very high standards. Almost all analyse historical sources with considerable skill, identifying and explaining, for example, different views on why the Nazis were able to come to power.

Teaching and Learning

133. Teachers manage students effectively. They carefully plan seating arrangements to ensure that all are able to work together productively. Less able students are given well-targeted help to ensure that they can carry out their tasks. This is especially good when those with special needs have the benefit of working with a learning support assistant. The open-ended nature of many tasks provides good opportunities to think independently and scope for higher attainers to achieve well. In most lessons, students benefit from good opportunities to improve their writing and speaking skills. Assessment is planned to be an integral part of learning. This is seen, for example, when students are asked to write evaluations of how well work has gone as part of homework tasks. Teachers keep detailed records of students' performance and use these to identify and help those in danger of underachieving. Although much marking is thorough and informative to students, in a few classes in Years 7 to 9, it is too infrequent and consists merely of ticks, which do not tell

students how they can improve. This has a negative impact upon the quality of work in students' exercise books. Most students respond positively to the interesting tasks and high expectations that teachers set by showing considerable interest, working with effort and pace and participating well in discussions. In a few lessons, the attitudes of a small number are unsatisfactory however. Teachers usually work hard to ensure that their achievement is still satisfactory, by giving frequent reminders and closely checking their work but, on a few occasions, they do not ensure that all are paying full attention during explanations and discussions.

Leadership and management

134. The department is very well organised on a day-to-day basis, with a clear, comprehensive handbook and regular departmental bulletins to guide staff. This ensures strong guidance for teachers and is particularly effective in providing high quality placements for student interns. Leadership is characterised by an exceptionally clear vision and high aspirations. This has resulted in strong progress in areas such as ensuring that assessment contributes to learning and that boys achieve as well as girls. It shows awareness of areas in need of further improvement, for example in planning a strong contribution to students' numeracy skills and awareness of citizenship. It has also ensured that the subject has been able to meet the considerable challenge of the school's reorganisation.

Religious education

Provision for religious education is good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievements	Good	Good
Teaching and Learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of good and well-planned teaching
- Students learn well because they are interested in their courses, which are very relevant to their lives
- Good leadership and management have recently established good GCSE courses for students
- Teachers do not always consolidate students' understanding and learning sufficiently

Commentary

Examination results

135. There were no GCSE results in 2004, as the GCSE course has only just been introduced.

Standards and achievement

136. Students enter Year 7 with average standards. Standards of the students in the present Year 9 are above the level expected in the local Agreed Syllabus. This good progress and achievement is reflected in students' good knowledge and understanding of the beliefs of the major world faiths.
137. Standards of students in Year 10, taking GCSE in philosophy and ethics, are above average. They discuss issues sensitively and use their research work on world faiths well to support their ideas in debate and essays. Their achievement is good given their level of entry to the course. Standards of students on the non-examination core course are above Agreed Syllabus expectations and they too achieve well, having a good understanding of religious views on many issues linked to everyday life.

Teaching and learning

138. Teachers are very enthusiastic and often use their story-telling skills very well to interest the students. Year 8 students were gripped as their teacher told them the story of Holy Week. They learned very well as the teacher skilfully linked Jesus' story to modern times that they could easily understand. In the most effective lessons, active learning opportunities are very evident. This was seen when Year 7 students planned a radio news flash on the Plagues of Egypt. Through very good teamwork their understanding of the effects of the ten plagues on the Egyptians developed considerably. Teachers plan well and ask searching questions of students about belief and moral issues relevant to teenagers. Controversial issues such as the rights and wrongs of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia form the base of lively debate. Teaching was less good when students were asked to copy or make simple notes rather than to take part in active tasks, such as role-play, discussion or debate. In these lessons, the pace of learning slowed and although learning was satisfactory, the students were not sufficiently challenged.
139. Assessment is good. Marking is thorough and constructive and the very good assessment sheets are helping students make good progress.

Leadership and management

140. Leadership and management are good. The rapid development of GCSE and GCE programmes has raised the profile of the subject within the school very well. The teachers, including the non-subject specialists, are well motivated and a strong team is developing well. Monitoring of the department is good, with performance management and informal lesson observations. The previously known shortfall in suitable courses for all has now been very well resolved, with all students taking courses well designed to meet the requirements of the county Agreed Syllabus for religious education.
141. Students listen to one another well and are usually tolerant of views that differ from their own. The curriculum gives them good opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, cultural and social skills. They are very aware of the importance of moral codes as was particularly seen in work on capital punishment and issues around euthanasia and abortion. Students also reflected very well when exploring issues such as the plight of refugees.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers support students well to enable them to work independently in practical lessons
- Teachers use exemplar and demonstration effectively, giving students a clear idea of the standards expected
- The learning schemes lack sufficient range to ensure that more able students are always sufficiently challenged
- Some aspects of assessment, including marking and use of targets, are not used consistently in all areas of design and technology

Commentary

Examination results

142. The subject consists of graphic products, food, product design and textiles in Years 7 to 9. GCSE courses are offered in graphic products, food and product design in Years 10 and 11. Results in GCSE examinations are broadly in line with national averages.

Standards and achievement

143. Students start the school in Year 7 with below average skills in design and technology and, by the end of Year 9, they have made good progress to reach standards broadly in line with the national average. Most have a thorough understanding of the design process. Year 11 students achieve well in reaching national average standards in their GCSE major projects. Students enjoy practical work; they work with enthusiasm and make high quality products. ICT is used well by students, particularly in Years 7-9, to extend their practical skills, present written work neatly and for research to underpin design work.

Teaching and learning

144. Teachers develop very good working relationships with students, supporting their learning and enabling them to work confidently and competently in lessons. Well-established routines are taught effectively in practical lessons to ensure students can work independently and safely. A good feature of teaching is the brisk pace, particularly in practical lessons, which keeps the students focused. Teachers demonstrate techniques and use exemplar materials in lessons very effectively to show students the level and quality of work expected from them. In Years 7 to 9, students benefit from a well-structured design and technology programme and homework is used well to reinforce learning. However, the planned activities do not always extend the learning of more able students. Students with special educational needs make good progress as a result of the good support provided by learning assistants and teachers who understand and meet their needs.
145. Assessment is used inconsistently across the areas of design and technology. Where it is used effectively, students know what level they are working at and what target grade they are working towards. Marking is positive and informs the student of what they have to do to improve. A good example of assessment was seen in a Year 8 textiles lesson, where the students self-assessed their work and related it to the National Curriculum level they were working to.

Leadership and management

146. There is a very strong drive to improve students' achievement within the department and structures are in place to support this. Departmental documentation is good and appropriate programmes of work are being developed. Teachers' expertise is used well within the aspects of design and technology, particularly in Years 10 and 11. There are good staff development opportunities to develop further their skills in the subject.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Overall provision in art and design is very good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good
Leadership	Very good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students in Year 11 reach well above average standards because teachers use their very good subject knowledge to support and guide them
- Students achieve particularly well with the process of developing an idea, from research through to their final design
- Students are not given sufficiently clear guidance on how to improve their levels of artistic knowledge or skills
- The very good range of enrichment opportunities makes a significant contribution to students' knowledge of art and artists

Commentary

Examination Results

147. The 2004 GCSE examination results in art and design were well above average. Girls performed better than boys, but the difference is less than that found nationally. Results over the last three years have been well above average, and much higher than previous years, with over half of students gaining the very highest grades.

Standards and achievement

148. Students enter the school with a range of previous experience, but overall standards are below average. By Year 9, because of the good teaching they receive, students have begun to understand how to analyse and respond to artists' work. They use a wide range of media effectively in their visual responses to the work of other artists. Their drawing and painting skills are average. Observation is not always accurate, and shading is not subtly used. However, the majority of students reach above average standards. All students achieve well during Years 7-9.
149. By Year 11 standards are well above average. Students analyse and respond to an extensive range of artists and cultures. They use a variety of media, including manipulating images with computers. Students' skills with using abstraction are well above average, and they use their growing knowledge of art very effectively to inform their work. Students of lower ability show less confidence in drawing and painting. Overall, in Years 10-11, achievement is very good.
150. Girls achieve slightly better than boys, because their research work is more extensive, and they explain the development of their ideas more clearly. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students, as do those from ethnic minorities.

Teaching and learning

151. Overall teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use their extensive expertise to prepare well-organised lessons, with clear explanations and demonstrations of techniques, such as printing. The best lessons resemble adult workshops, with students working very hard, and really enjoying their learning. Teachers tailor their advice very effectively and this helps students to explore new directions. In Years 7-9, teaching is not as consistent in quality as in Years 10-11. Where teaching is satisfactory, teachers tend to focus on tasks rather than learning. In some lessons, a small minority of boys waste time talking.
152. Teachers provide good oral feedback and mark work regularly. However, the marking does not provide students with information about how well they are doing related to examination criteria or grades, and the points to improve tend to focus on next steps with tasks, rather than learning.

Leadership and management

153. Leadership and management are very good. Leadership is dedicated to students achieving very high standards, and staff are expected to work hard. Monitoring of teaching and learning is regularly carried out, and currently action is being taken to address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. The department is working hard to develop a team ethos over the two sites, but this is not yet fully effective. Art contributes richly to students' personal development. Visits by artists and trips to galleries locally, and nationally, further enrich students' experience.

Drama

Provision in drama is good.

	Years 7- 9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and Learning	Good	Very good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good because it is well planned and well informed
- GCSE examination results were very high in 2004 reflecting good achievement
- The subject contributes well to students' personal and social development
- There is insufficient emphasis in training students to work together in groups

Commentary

154. Standards of attainment are high because teachers ensure that students have a clear understanding of the skills they require to be successful. The quality of work is particularly good in Years 10-11 and is reflected in GCSE examination results that were very high in 2004 when 90 percent of students entered gained A* to C grades.
155. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan their lessons well and their enthusiasm inspires students. Excellent technical advice is given to the GCSE students who receive supportive comments for their portfolio assignments.
156. The majority of students in the school enjoy drama in lessons and during the many extra-curricular opportunities provided. This is reflected in their attitude during lessons. Where they are attentive and enthusiastic they quickly become immersed in their work. Even so, a few students are less focused in their work in Year 7, partly because some students have yet to acquire the necessary skills to work independently in groups.
157. Drama provides opportunities for students to explore a range of moral, personal and social issues. Year 10 students recently took part in National Holocaust Day.
158. The leadership and management of drama are good. Units of work have been produced which ensure continuity and progression in the teaching of the subject. As a result the subject makes a significant contribution to the curriculum aims and ethos of the school.

Music

Provision in music is good.

	Years 7- 9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and Learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The strength of music contributes substantially to the whole school ethos
- Music lessons celebrate cultural diversity and promote social integration
- Assessment and individual student tracking is underdeveloped
- Very good leadership is moving the department forward
- A considerable number of instrumentalists in all years perform to a high standard

Commentary

Examination results

159. In 2003, standards in GCSE were slightly below average but a significant number of students obtained higher grades compared with the national proportion. Boys' results were well above national averages in the higher grades.

Standards and achievement

160. At the end of Year 9 standards are above national expectations. Present standards in Years 10-11 are above average. Students show high levels of musicianship combining performing, composing and listening skills with confidence.
161. Achievement is good overall and is very good in Years 10-11. Students with special educational needs are integrated well in lessons and are able to achieve well as a result of support and guidance. Students with specific needs, such as those with hearing

impairment or autism, achieve well in lessons due to the accessibility of the curriculum, individual plans and support from assistants. Students' knowledge of musical terminology is supported in all years by good use of log books. Singing in the school is of a high standard and is a strong feature in lessons.

Teaching and learning

162. Teaching is good overall in both Years 7-9 and Years 10-11. Teachers display deep knowledge of their subject and complement each other in their skills. Recently revised schemes of work include a focus on world music and bring together the cultural diversity of students in the school. Where lessons are very good or better, teaching motivates students with a lively pace and a variety of learning styles. In a Year 7 lesson, students readily improvised pentatonic melodies and performed enthusiastically with accuracy in rhythm and part-sharing. Students talk confidently about their music using fluent terminology. In a Year 8 lesson, students performed Ghanaian African drumming techniques with good ensemble awareness, responding with impressive physical control and sensitivity to dynamics. In a Year 9 lesson, although teaching was satisfactory, it did not match individual strengths and this inhibited the progress some higher attaining students could make. In a Year 10 lesson, students learning about serialism were asked physically to become notes of a scale and, through exciting practical activities, matched to individual abilities, quickly grasped concepts. Students use their very good instrumental skills in practical lessons. Where teaching is over-reliant on listening skills as a learning style, lower attaining students show a lack of understanding. Feedback for improvement is given verbally with some written comments. The department is committed to developing more rigorous systems for feedback.

Leadership and management

163. Leadership is very good, providing a strong role model for all students and staff, and a clear vision for the department. The head of music is also newly appointed as head of performing arts, and is developing work across all three subjects. The strong leadership of the team, together with revised schemes of work and a wide variety of enrichment and extra curricular programmes is moving the department forward. Music contributes significantly to the life of the school and the wider community.
164. Management of the department is good. Assessment and student tracking is slowly developing, in order that teachers can plan for individual student progression, and new systems for monitoring and recording are underway. There is a large force of seventeen instrumental teachers to manage who promote high standards in instrumental lessons as well as contributing to extra activities. Without a recording technician, the large number of essential recordings of students' work is very time consuming for staff. Recent major improvements in music technology, including a fully equipped recording studio, a music computer room, and a wealth of varied resources have enhanced what is on offer to students. As a natural progression the school has applied for Artsmark Gold which is a national award that recognises the high quality of arts provision in a school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education is taught as a core subject and is offered as a GCSE and as a BTEC first certificate.

Provision for physical education is very good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Well above Average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average
- Very effective teaching results in achievement which is good by Year 9 and very good by Year 11
- Students' very good attitudes and behaviour contribute to their learning
- Assessment in Year 9 is good; it is not fully effective in core physical education in Year 11

Commentary

Results

165. GCSE results in 2004 were well above average. All students achieved a pass grade.

Standards and achievement

166. Most students enter Year 7 with average levels of attainment. As a result of very good teaching, by the end of Year 9 they have developed a wide range of skills and abilities to above average standards. For example in Year 7, dance students link gymnastic skills well when performing a routine and use their knowledge of unison, cannon and mirror to observe each other and suggest ways to improve their performance. In Year 8, good quality ball handling and communication in rugby training drills are used well during first and second phase attacking play. By Year 9, students understand their own strengths and weaknesses and know how to analyse trampoline moves by working with a partner to evaluate bounce routines.
167. **Years 10 and 11 core physical education:** in Year 10 football, boys use the width of the pitch very well when setting up attacking moves. They use very good passing skills and tactical play to set up opportunities for a shot at goal. In the use of trampoline they are able to link a back drop to half twist, have good body tension and control and know how to use their arms and head for rotation. In basketball in Year 11, boys and girls use very good footwork and shoot using a lay-up with precision; they evaluate their performance and know how continual practice will improve their ability to use different attacking options.
168. **GCSE and BTEC First sports studies:** Students understand the role of the media and its impact on sport. They know that it has both positive and negative effects on sports coverage and on individual athletes. Students have a very good knowledge of the skeletal function. They identify and explain the functions of bones, know the different types of joints and understand very well the anatomical terminology associated with movement. The students make good progress in the BTEC and achieve well in the practical activities.

Teaching and learning

169. Teachers have high expectations; they are energetic and eager to strive for improvement. They have very good subject knowledge. Detailed planning makes sure there are different activities so all students maintain their interest in the lessons. Teachers are prepared to try different approaches and share these with students. For example, when planning an assessment in a dance lesson, the teacher outlined the National Curriculum differences for level and then asked students to decide on criteria for gauging each other's progress. This had a positive impact on students' learning about evaluation and about National Curriculum levels. Students are extremely well motivated during lessons. They are eager to participate and are well turned out. Lessons are consistent in organisation. Each has an introduction so students all know what is to be covered, and key words are used to reinforce physical education terminology and to help literacy development. Teachers remind students during

lessons about the objectives, so focus is maintained and teachers check understanding at the end of each lesson.

Leadership and management

170. Leadership is purposeful and provides clear direction for future development. All staff are well qualified, have clearly defined responsibilities and make a valuable contribution to the development of the department. The focus is on teaching and learning and improving standards. Teachers work well as a team when assessing progress in Years 7 to 9. They check each others' marking and this leads to accuracy in teacher assessments at the end of Year 9. The process for measuring performance in Years 10 and 11 is not fully developed. The development plan identifies areas for improvement in line with whole-school issues. The split site means there is no central area for resources and this sometimes hampers communications.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

171. The GNVQ in ICT was the focus for this inspection and that is reported elsewhere in the report.

The school has recently started the applied GCSE course in business to better provide for those students less engaged by the current curriculum. The lesson sampled provided relevant business contexts and good opportunities to use ICT. Students made sound progress though were variable in their commitment to learning.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The good PSHE programme is carefully integrated with citizenship and RE to provide a cohesive provision. PSHE is provided by the tutors with the support of the citizenship team which has the confidence and expertise to tackle a number of the key aspects including sex and drug education.

Citizenship

In Years 7, 8 and 9, citizenship is taught within the personal, social, health and citizenship education programme. It is also included in other subject areas, as well as the tutorial programme. In Years 10 and 11, all students take a GCSE short course in citizenship studies.

Provision in citizenship is good.

	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and Learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school shows a strong commitment to providing high quality citizenship courses
- The contribution by subject departments to citizenship is comprehensive and well planned
- Students have good opportunities to develop skills of participation and responsible action
- A minority of students in Years 10-11 are unconvinced of the value and purpose of citizenship
- Some teaching provides insufficient challenge, particularly for higher attaining students

Commentary

Examination results

172. The GCSE citizenship course was introduced at the beginning of the current academic year, so no students have as yet taken the examination.

Standards and achievement

173. Students achieve well in citizenship, and the overall standard of work observed throughout the school is above average. They make good progress in acquiring the skills of enquiry and communication. Many higher attaining students demonstrate highly developed discussion skills, for example in lessons in Year 9 relating to immigration, refugees and asylum seekers. They can put forward arguments in a very articulate way, supporting them with relevant examples, and are prepared to modify their views in the light of new evidence.

In Year 11, students develop the skills of participation and responsible action through their work on active citizenship projects for their GCSE course. All students have good opportunities to practise these skills through participating in the work of the school and year councils, and through organizing many charity fund-raising activities.

Teaching and learning

174. No teaching was less than satisfactory, and in the majority of lessons observed teaching and learning were good. Teachers plan their lessons with care to include activities that generally succeed in engaging students' interest in citizenship topics. In a mathematics lesson, for example, the teacher gave an effective explanation of the income tax and national insurance system. Teachers ensure that all students, including those with special educational needs, have the opportunity to take part in discussions: they encourage students to listen to and respect each others' views, and to challenge assumptions and "common sense" ideas. In the best lessons, students were helped to learn about serious issues through enjoyable and stimulating activities. For example in a Year 11 lesson, students wrote and spoke in support of their own election manifestos, and then voted for their preferred candidates, following different electoral systems. However, in a number of lessons, teachers did not fully exploit powerful resources, such as a video about third world debt, to give students the opportunity to reflect, and to develop their views. In general, students receive good quality feedback about their work. The school has developed a well-conceived system whereby teachers assess students' work according to a range of criteria, and set individual targets, although this is not yet consistently applied.

Leadership and management

175. The school has developed a clear vision of how citizenship is to be delivered throughout the school. It has clearly identified the contribution to be made by each subject department as well as by assemblies and tutor group periods, although arrangements for monitoring the impact of this contribution are not fully developed. The school has demonstrated its commitment to citizenship by allocating, for example, several senior members of staff to teach it, and by making the GCSE short course compulsory for all students in Years 10 and 11. Most students understand the meaning of citizenship and have positive attitudes towards it, although a minority resent its imposition and are unconvinced of its value. Nevertheless, the school has done a great deal in a short space of time to provide a coherent and comprehensive citizenship programme for all its students and includes comments on students' progress in reports to parents.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

Level 3 GCE A level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art & Design	30	100	98.3	66.7	50.2	94.7	87.1
Biology	32	96.9	96.6	50	40	84.4	79.3
Business Studies	15	100	98.9	40	39.4	84	81.8
Chemistry	33	100	97.7	60.6	50	92.1	85.7
Classical studies	1	100	99.6	0	58.1	80	92.8
Communication studies	30	100	99.2	80	40.4	104.7	83.5
Drama	14	100	99.6	50	42.8	85.7	85.1
Economics	25	100	98.8	68	54.3	100	89.8
English / English Language	44	100	99.2	40.9	36.4	83.6	81.1
English Literature	27	100	99.4	59.3	44.9	94.8	85.5
French	20	100	99.0	55	53.1	95	88.9
Design & Technology	5	100	97.8	0	35.0	56	77.9
General Studies	25	100	94.9	32	30.5	78.4	72.9
Geography	23	100	98.8	34.8	46.4	83.5	85.2
German	3	100	98.6	66.7	49.6	100	86.3
History	28	100	99.0	53.6	45.6	92.9	85.1
Information Technology	17	94.1	96.3	29.4	25.7	69.4	71.1
Mathematics	53	98.1	96.8	73.6	56.6	98.1	89.5
Music	14	100	98.2	50	37.1	87.1	79.5
Other Languages	2	100	97.3	100	66.7	120	95.6
Other Social Studies	48	97.9	97.4	39.6	42.5	80.8	81.6
Physics	29	96.6	96.7	51.7	45.3	89	82.6
Religious Studies	1	100	99.1	100	49.5	120	87.4
Sociology	9	100	98.5	44.4	45.3	93.3	84.6
Spanish	6	100	98.2	83.3	53.5	106.7	88.7
Sports / PE Studies	9	100	97.8	55.6	30.9	88.9	75.4

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

During the inspection the focus subjects were English literature and French. Courses in media studies, English language and literature combined, German and Spanish were also sampled.

In media studies, the lesson was very well prepared and well taught, so that students were able to understand and apply key technical vocabulary in their analysis of film. Students gain good insights into techniques which they are able to express clearly and well. Results have been above average and standards continue to be so.

In the English language and literature lesson, good teaching used materials and resources effectively. Students' ideas were used well to revise the language of analysis and use it to explore how comic effects were achieved in a script. Students achieved well, with standards above the national average.

In the German lesson observed in Year 12, students' knowledge of grammar was advanced through very good teaching and a challenging and interesting range of tasks. Standards are above average, similar to results in 2004.

Spanish results in 2004 were well above the national average, as they were in the lesson sampled. Students made very good progress developing their listening and speaking skills, using sophisticated phrasing and vocabulary.

English literature

Provision in English literature is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results and standards are consistently well above the national average
- Students achieve very well because of knowledgeable, thoughtful teaching
- Very good leadership and management keep the focus on a desire to succeed
- Precise reference to texts to justify ideas is not frequent enough and students are not always encouraged sufficiently to use exact literary quotation as part of analysis and essay writing

Commentary

Examination results

176. Results in the course at A-level in 2004 were well above average, with boys and girls doing equally well and generally doing better than in their other subjects. This continued the standards of previous years. AS results too, continued to be well above average.

Standards and achievement

177. English courses are popular with sixth form students. The English literature course attracts a number of very able students, including an unusually high proportion of boys. Present standards are well above average, reflecting students' very good achievement during the course. Students learn the art of succinct summary both in discussion and essay. They use research and wider reading particularly well and quickly see links between and within texts.

Many are able to cope with abstract ideas, ambiguity, and the complexity of language and ideas in demanding works of literature by writers such as Chaucer and Webster. Lessons and essays show a very good level of academic and intellectual enquiry. A relative weakness is that students do not habitually use brief, apt quotation to illuminate issues and justify opinion. Some average attaining students write interesting essays which show much awareness and understanding but move away from the specific terms of the question. Written work is lengthy, well written, thoughtful, and with good cross-reference to other works or to the social/cultural background to the work being studied. Lower attaining students are less skilled in using the vocabulary of literary criticism to demonstrate and increase their understanding of literature.

Teaching and learning

178. Students benefit from teaching which is consistently very good. Teachers have an excellent knowledge, not only of specific texts but also of the canon of English literature, and this they use to widen students' understanding of, and interest in, great works. Lessons are very well planned and organised, some making exemplary use of Powerpoint, so that students learn to respond to texts with a combination of enthusiasm and critical awareness. The result is a shared joy in exploring literature, and a mutual determination not to be too easily satisfied with the orthodox or mediocre. Students learn to propose and justify ideas because of skilled open-ended questioning and frequent small group work. Teachers do not make sufficient use of exact quotation as a tool to clarify meaning, nor do they sufficiently encourage its use by students. Essays are demanding, and very carefully linked to examination criteria which are shared with students. The latter then know exactly what they need to do and demonstrate to succeed. Thorough and regular marking gives detailed comment about what has been achieved, and specific, individual advice about how improvements might be made.

Leadership and management

179. Very good leadership has ensured a clear vision for progress, and created a climate where teachers and students alike aspire to high standards. Management is very good, ensuring that well-organised systems are in place to support learning, and that there are close checks on how well the department is doing to see where things could be even better. The quality of resources prepared for students is especially good. Students' attitudes are always very good, sometimes outstanding, and they are very complimentary about the quality of teaching and support they get on the English literature course.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

180. Students overall have well above average literacy skills when they join the sixth form. This means that most are highly articulate in discussion, having command of a rich and wide vocabulary. In many lessons, teachers make good use of this in class debate and group discussion, and it proves invaluable in increasing students' understanding and awareness. In occasional lessons, the teachers' views and voice are too dominant; in others, some students try to mask lack of understanding by well-worded but woolly statements. High-level reading skills allow most students to access texts and information quickly, including that available on the Internet. Whilst most use such information well, assimilating it into their own views, a minority make unthinking use of it. Well above average writing skills are evident in the quality of notes and research, and coursework shows the ability to write at length, usually with interest and relevance.

French

Provision in French is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
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Standards	Above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good

Main strengths

- Results are consistently above national averages
- Very well prepared teaching helps students to achieve very well
- Students have very good attitudes, enjoy excellent relationships with teachers and each other and learn enthusiastically
- Curriculum planning and assessment are sensitive to the needs of all students
- Students benefit from a rich cultural and linguistic diet on their courses

Commentary

Examination results

181. In 2004, more than half of GCE A level candidates achieved grades A to B and all achieved grades A to E. This is above the national average and is similar to 2003 figures. Results at AS level were in line with national averages, similar to 2003. Boys did significantly better than girls.

Standards and achievement

182. Standards of current students are above average. Year 13 students employed a good range of learning strategies in coordinating their ideas, listening for gist and summarising a French spoken report on AIDS. Two Year 12 classes explored the language and techniques of film criticism through a challenging range of tasks to which they responded enthusiastically. Year 12 students had progressed significantly beyond GCSE and showed a very good capacity for analysis and reflection on linguistic features of French. Scrutiny of students' work showed very good study of literary texts such as *L'Etranger* as well as a good range of writing on topics such as French politics and the environment. Year 12 students had produced a word-processed magazine with articles on a wide variety of interesting themes. Their folders also showed the development of a strong core of grammatical knowledge appropriate for successful advanced study.

Teaching and learning

183. Teachers are highly skilled linguists and provide excellent role-models. Lessons are very well prepared and resourced and a wide range of up-to-date materials is used. Teachers' enthusiasm and commitment inspires a desire to learn in students. There is rigour and high expectation, but lessons are also carefully planned to address all students' needs. Relationships are notably good. As a result of all these factors, students learn very well. Their work is meticulously and conscientiously assessed and they are very clear as to their personal targets. Their attitudes to French and their motivation are very good. They are prepared to engage with topics, to seek clarification and use their French naturally in classroom discourse. Students enjoy the course and particularly appreciate the relevant topics they study, opportunities to learn through ICT and their very good relations with teachers.

Leadership and management

184. A team of teachers runs the course, providing variety of input and enriching students' exposure to French. The curriculum is very well planned, especially in Year 13, where outcomes of assessment shape the content of lessons to support individuals and their needs. Good use is made of ICT and other media to enrich the curriculum and the French assistant plays a key role in supporting students' linguistic development.
185. Standards have risen over recent years, notably among boys, and the overall quality of teaching has been maintained.

MATHEMATICS

The school offers a wide range of mathematics courses. A level maths was the focus subject and further maths was sampled.

Standards seen in further maths were well above average. The teachers' good subject knowledge generated very good discussion amongst the students, who had excellent attitudes towards learning.

Provision in mathematics is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good subject and examination knowledge enables them to question very constructively and to provide a well-structured learning progression for students
- Students learn very well as the result of the combination of the maturity of their attitudes with the mostly very good teaching that they receive
- Occasionally, lessons do not include a variety of activities to keep students' interest
- Sixth form students are offered a wide range of mathematics courses which they can match to their interests and abilities
- Data on students' performance are well collated but too little use is made of the data to set targets and measure progress against them

Commentary

Examination results

186. Results in mathematics and in further mathematics in the A level examinations in 2004 were well above the national average, an improvement on the results for 2003, which were above average. Fewer girls took examinations, but they performed relatively better than boys. Performance in mathematics was relatively, slightly better than in students' other subjects. Over half of students obtained A/B grades.

Standards and achievement

187. At entry to AS/A level mathematics courses, students' standards are above average. Well above average standards were observed during the inspection, in lessons and in students' work. In a very good Year 12 lesson, an interested group of students extended their knowledge, starting from basic trigonometric ratios. They were ultimately successful in solving trigonometric equations requiring quadratic factorisation, through completing a carefully graded set of exercises and receiving reminders about trigonometric identities. Teachers' logical development of difficult ideas and high-level skills, ensures very good achievement by their well-motivated students. Students are very appreciative of the quality of their teaching.

Teaching and learning

188. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and of how it is learned effectively. Most teaching of AS/A mathematics is very good and very clear, although a minority is dull and involves lengthy note-taking. Generally, teachers use their expert subject and examination knowledge to pose very searching questions for students, who respond well to these challenges, using their very good cooperative and independent learning skills. For example, in a very well taught Year 13 revision lesson on a mechanics unit, all students contributed to discussions stimulated by the teacher, resulting in very good individual consolidation of learning on topics including projectiles and centres of mass. In-class assessment, sometimes carried out with individual whiteboards, and use of the results of module mini-tests, enable teachers to identify those who are making the least progress, so that individual support can be given at an early stage of each new topic. The use of

assessment for learning is still at an early stage of development so students are not very clear about how they can improve their work. Some teachers give constructive feedback on marking but practice is variable. Use of ICT in class by students to support their learning of mathematics is limited, although some teachers make very effective use of laptops and data projectors in their teaching.

Leadership and management

189. A very effective team of sixth form mathematics teachers has been built, functioning very well on a day-to-day basis. Leadership provides very good role models for teachers. Clear vision for sixth form mathematics has resulted in the provision of a wide range of courses, from a GCSE resit course for those hoping to improve their GCSE grade to the popular A level further mathematics course. It includes free-standing mathematics units for those students who wish to develop their knowledge of mathematics without undertaking a complete AS course. Good additional individualised challenges are provided for the highest-attaining students. Detailed schemes of work have been developed to match the new examination specifications. Topics are carefully specified lesson by lesson, but do not yet include guidance on teaching approaches or suitable resources. Monitoring of teaching, including by checking students' work and its marking, is not rigorous enough. Detailed student performance data are collated but they are neither thoroughly analysed for patterns of performance nor used to set targets for student improvement.

Mathematics across the curriculum

190. Sixth form students use their very good numeracy skills to support their learning in many other subject areas. In biology, students demonstrate a range of very good statistical skills, including the use of t-tests, to support their coursework. Physics students make extensive use of mathematics, for example showing well above average competence in exploring equations relating to magnetic flux and interpreting them in terms of Fleming's left-hand rule, and in interpreting velocity-time graphs. In art, good competence is shown in ratio and proportion, perspective and enlargement. Geography students correctly identify discrete and continuous data, and make good choices of graphs to support their fieldwork. In design and technology, students measure with a high degree of accuracy in final design drawings, for example in producing a portable disability access ramp. Overall, competence in numeracy across the sixth form curriculum is well above average.

SCIENCE

Biology, chemistry, physics and psychology were focus subjects. The 'public understanding of science' AS course was sampled.

In a Year 12 class on the public understanding of science course, students were being well prepared for research coursework. They had marked sample work using examination board criteria and subsequently were given the examiner's comments. The teacher, acting as supervisor, offered good advice and guidance on how to structure research.

Biology

Provision in biology is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' very positive attitudes contribute to their very good achievement
- Very good teaching employs a wide range of strategies to enhance students' learning
- Students have a high regard for the very good support they receive
- Assessment that helps students improve is insufficiently developed.

Commentary

Examination Results

191. In 2004, at AS and at A level, two thirds of students attained A and B grades, a very good achievement. Overall results were above the national average. Several students, who had weaker GCSE results when they started the course, gained the lower grades. Nevertheless their achievement was good, considering their prior attainment. There was no significant difference between the results of boys and girls.

Standards and achievement

192. Standards observed were well above average. Nearly two thirds of the current Year 13 students gained A and A* at GCSE. Most of these students attain A and B grades in current work. Their attitudes to the subject and their work are very positive. This also applies to students who have joined the sixth form from other schools. Coursework done very recently by Year 13 students show well above average standards of literacy, being very well written and word processed, and of numeracy, in the handling of parametric statistics – a t-test in the analysis of wheel populations. Most students are achieving very well.

Teaching and learning

193. Teaching is very good. This judgement is supported by a strong student perception of very good support and guidance. There was a very good range of teaching strategies in use. These included Year 12 model making and presentation, which gave evidence of very good achievement in the understanding of DNA transcription and translation. Good use was made of student self-assessment and the students concerned were able to use complex thinking skills, by being able to predict what would have happened if incorrect models of DNA structure had been true. Very good use was made of ICT and video material, for example in Year 13, the use of 'The Cage' to stimulate understanding of acetylcholine and choline esterase, and the effects of nerve gas and its antidote. The biology department's use of lecture/seminar techniques does not always allow students enough time to express independent thought.

Leadership and management

194. Leadership and management are good. Tracking of achievement is good and to some extent predates school systems, comparing outcomes with attainment on entry. The system does not yet benefit from complete data about students new to the sixth form. Fieldwork is an established and valued part of biology 'A' level. Accommodation and resources are very good. Standards and numbers have risen over the past few years.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good

Main strengths

- Teachers have particularly high knowledge and understanding of chemistry
- Students' very good achievement is associated with their very positive attitudes

- Very good leadership has concentrated on very effective induction of teachers new to A level

Commentary

Examination results

195. In 2004, results at AS level were above average and at A level well above average. A few students, with lower attainment on entry, attained lower grades at AS level. Year on year there was no systematic difference between boys and girls and minority ethnic students did as well as their peers.

Standards and achievement

196. Standards observed were well above average. The department attracts a large majority of A and A* students, most of whom attain A and B grades at A level. Their attitudes to the school, the subject and their work are very positive. They are given the opportunity to think for themselves and show strong achievement in the way that they can handle systematic chemical nomenclature, make calculations and predict reaction mechanisms. They are capable of predicting unknown reactions from considering the type of bonds involved. Achievement by Year 13 is very good.

Teaching and learning

197. Teaching is very good, with very strong chemical understanding. Some lessons were excellent. Very clear explanations were seen in a lesson on halogenoalkanes. Very good use was made of ICT in several lessons including one on properties of elements. Good use was made of student self-assessment, for example use of the 'red, amber, green' system to assess understanding of chemical energetics. In an excellent lesson on reaction mechanisms, students were given the opportunity to show what they could do – and predict an intermediate stage in a reaction, as well as make a link between the rate determining step and activation energy. Overall the department's predominant style is the lecture/seminar mode but with a powerful dialectic in which students contribute and question as well as answer.

Leadership and management

198. Leadership and management are very good. Tracking of achievement is good. Careful analysis of module tests identifies areas to be tackled, such as precision of expression. The department therefore contributes well to literacy, as well as to numeracy and ICT. Staffing is excellent and a collective sense is increased by such things as sharing resources, a common system of practical work and a conscious policy to extend the range of teachers new to A level. Accommodation and resources are very good, and very well looked after. Links with higher education are strong and a series of events, workshops and researchers in residence add to very good enrichment. Numbers taking chemistry have risen over recent years, as have standards achieved.

Physics

Provision in physics is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have a very positive attitude to their work and have well-developed study skills

- Stimulating lessons encourage a lively exchange between knowledgeable teachers and questioning students
- Supportive relationships, together with high aspirations, lead to very good achievement
- Data analysis is not used rigorously enough as an aid to curriculum planning

Commentary

Examination results

199. A-level results were above average in 2004. The percentage of students gaining grade A was well above average.

Standards and achievement

200. Standards seen in lessons were well above average. Year 13 students were extremely well focused during a timed practical session measuring the effect of a magnetic field on the period of oscillation of a suspended magnet. They followed instructions carefully and took measurements accurately. They were successful in plotting logarithmic graphs of their results. Year 12 students asked searching questions during a lesson on work, energy and power to increase their understanding of the topic.
201. Students make very good progress during the two year course. Entry to the course varies, but is normally above average. The majority of students achieve their target grade or better both at AS level and at A level.

Teaching and learning

202. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. Mature relationships enable an easy flow of debate between students and teachers. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and can respond well to challenging questioning from students. Lessons are well planned and resourced, so students can focus on their learning. As opportunities are provided for individual and group work, teachers can interact with individual students and sort out their difficulties. In a Year 13 lesson on electromagnetic induction, examples were discussed to reinforce prior learning. Students who still had difficulties to resolve arranged an extra lesson with the teacher. ICT was well used to illustrate the ideas discussed. Students were very positive about the quality of teaching and really appreciated the support teachers provided. Students did not use the library, except as a quiet place for study, because books did not necessarily reflect their interests.

Leadership and management

203. Leadership and management of the department are good, with a strong sense of direction in the department shared by the team of seven teachers. The scheme of work is well organised and delivery is closely monitored. Students are tracked carefully so that they know how well they are doing. However, data is not used as rigorously as it could be to identify curricular needs, in particular those of weaker candidates.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards seen	Average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good

Main strengths

- Students display very positive attitudes that, along with good teaching, contribute to their good achievement
- Good leadership and management are reflected in accurate assessment and well-organised resources

Commentary

Examination results

204. In 2004 results at A level were in line with national average. There was no difference between boys and girls.

Standards and achievement

205. The standard on entry is below the average for A level classes; but the overall standard of attainment seen meets the national average and therefore achievement is good. A good contribution is made to literacy in the production of essays related to the examination boards criteria, thereby developing critical language skills. Coursework contains evidence of average standards of numeracy in handling of non-parametric statistics, for example Spearman's rank correlation in repeated taste tests. Evaluative skills are promoted in Year 12 work on analysing studies into a series of categories, including the ability to draw conclusions and make criticisms. Students are encouraged to evaluate their work. The students, including a number who have applied for university courses in psychology, are very positive about the subject. Their attitudes to work are good.

Teaching and learning

206. Teaching is good. Students rated highly the range of teaching methods in use, and the enthusiasm and support available. They were particularly appreciative of "the nice mix" of teaching strategies employed. These were clear in the schemes of work and included quizzes, discussion, comprehension, video essays and practical activities. Students particularly liked presentations of their own work and activities to illustrate different psychological studies. Assessment is good and well directed to key requirements such as evaluative comments. The moderators' report showed that the marking of coursework was "within tolerance". This accurate marking contributes to students' achievement.

Leadership and management

207. Leadership and management are good. There is a good balance of staffing and teachers' different styles are valued by the students. Accommodation and resources are good. An issue identified in the past, that boys were not involved sufficiently in lessons, is no longer a problem.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

There was no focus subject in this curriculum area. The GCE A level in information and communication technology (ICT) was sampled.

208. In 2004, results in AS/A2 ICT were in line with the national average and standards seen in the lesson observed were in line with course expectations. Students achieved well because teaching was built up systematically and they were well guided by the class teacher as they used a web-based modelling program to test various bridge designs given different scenarios.

HUMANITIES

Geography and history were focus subjects and religious education was sampled.

In religious education, students achieve well because of very well structured teaching that challenges them to explore their beliefs and consider the opinions of others very well.

Geography

Provision in geography is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and Learning	Very good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well because of very well directed, persistent questioning by teachers
- Most lessons are well planned to meet students' needs and encourage active participation
- Occasionally, students' progress slows in lessons where the pace and challenge does not keep them sufficiently focused on learning
- Students are well prepared because teachers have a very good knowledge of the syllabus and the examination requirements

Commentary

Examination results

209. The 2004 results were average overall; boys' results were relatively lower than girls' and below average. In 2003 the overall results were above the national average. Girls formed most of the group and their results were above average.

Standards and achievement

210. The current Year 12 and 13 are more capable groups and the standard of work observed, particularly the oral work, was well above average. Students demonstrate very good geographical knowledge and high-level skills in the way they classify and generalise from the specific to answer questions. This was illustrated in the generalisations they made about newly industrialised countries from their work on South Korea and Singapore. They have good comprehension skills and can provide well-reasoned economic arguments, backed by evidence. Year 12 students show very good fieldwork skills, collecting secondary data independently and choosing and evaluating different graphical techniques.
211. Achievement is very good. Students start the course with GCSE grades ranging from A* to C; a few have not taken GCSE. Geography is a subject of increasing popularity in the sixth form.

Teaching and learning

212. In the best lessons, students work very hard and make very good progress because persistent, effective, open-ended targeted questions challenge them to think out geographical issues. Assessment of their answers leads the teacher to rephrase questions and target those with less understanding. Teachers have a good knowledge of students' ability and pitch lessons well. Explanations are very clear and students are taught good study skills. For induction, students are set research work on migration; this forms an effective marker to inform teaching in Year 12. Students' analytical skills are very good and are encouraged by good teaching methods, for example using Venn diagrams to structure notes from class discussion. Resources are well chosen and interest the students. For example, newspaper articles on the local car industry stimulated a discussion on the changing nature of economic geography in the area. The teachers' very good knowledge of the examination requirements is used well to inform teaching with clear, well-directed advice on how students can improve their performance. Occasionally, however, where pace slackens and there is less challenge, students tend to lose direction, do not work as hard and so do not make good progress.

Leadership and management

213. Leadership is good, with high aspirations for the subject, and has been successful in raising the profile of geography and increasing the numbers of students taking the subject. The subject is managed well. New students with different geographical knowledge are well integrated. Planning is very good and there is frequent discussion between teachers, enabling expertise to be shared. Fieldwork is managed well with local visits and residential coursework that is integrated well into lessons.

History

Provision in history is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well because of very effective teaching and their own very positive response
- Teaching succeeds very well in providing a balance of strong guidance and opportunities for independent investigation
- Assessment procedures have a strong impact upon learning
- Leadership and management have ensured the continued success of the subject

Commentary

Examination results

214. A level results were well above average in 2004. Students' results were slightly better than those that they achieved in their other subjects. Results have been consistently at this level in recent years and the 2004 AS results for the current Year 13 students were also well above average.

Standards and achievement

215. Standards on entry to the course are generally above average for A level students in the subject. By Year 13, most strongly build upon this to become securely well above average, with a significant minority approaching very high standards. Most students show both a detailed knowledge of the individual events that they study and an understanding of the patterns that they fall into and their impact upon longer-term developments such as the Catholic Reformation. The essays of the highest attaining students are approaching very high standards in the way in which they analyse the various historical interpretations of the topics and events studied.

Teaching and learning

216. Teachers base their lessons upon expert knowledge of the topics studied and of the examination requirements. This provides stimulating history and very effective guidance on how to use this to succeed. Very well selected resources present opportunities to view events from different perspectives, enhancing students' understanding and their skills in analysing evidence. In most lessons, all students are very well provided for and involved in all activities. For example, teachers ensure that the confidence of lower attaining students is boosted by making very effective use of their work as examples in class discussions. Physically disabled students clearly enjoy playing a full role in debates. In a few lessons,

small numbers of students do not volunteer to take part in discussions and occasionally teachers do not do enough to ensure that they are involved. The challenging nature of tasks provides ample scope for the higher attaining students to reach the standards of which they are capable. Teachers strongly encourage students to keep their own records of successes in meeting specific examination criteria and of what they need to do to improve. Students respond by accepting a high level of responsibility for their own learning. They show very good attitudes by working with considerable enthusiasm and commitment. In one lesson, some who had not been present during the previous lesson, were able to participate fully because they had caught up with missed work under their own initiative. In discussion with inspectors, students were highly appreciative of the quality of teaching and the commitment and enthusiasm of teachers.

Leadership and management

217. The A level courses are very well planned and organised. Leadership is very strongly committed to maintaining the continued success of the department and its considerable popularity among students as an option choice.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

218. Design and technology has made significant improvements in the quality of work the students achieve. In two lessons observed the students were enthusiastic and fully committed to their course as a result of very good teaching. Students used ICT very competently to achieve a high standard of course work.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and theatre studies were focus subjects. Music was sampled.

Very good standards are maintained in music, with a substantial increase in numbers for the long-standing music course and the more recently introduced music technology course. Very good teaching in an analysis lesson led to students skilfully and creatively using a variety of musical techniques to identify structures.

Art and design

Provision in art and design is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their very good subject expertise to provide extremely effective support for students' achievement
- Students effectively research a wide range of art, including contemporary examples and those from other cultures
- Students receive very clear guidance on the tasks set but are not as clear on how they can move forward in their knowledge, understanding or skill development

Commentary

Examination results

219. Results in 2004 were above average. The 2003 A level results in art and design were well above average, with boys doing better than girls. Results in the Advanced Vocational Certificate Examination (AVCE) in 2003 were above average.

Standards and achievement

220. Standards in Year 13 are above average. Students carry out extensive research into other artists, and know about a wider range of artists than usual. They use artistic vocabulary to analyse and compare their work with that of others, and this is complemented by exciting visual responses using a variety of media. Students of average ability have not yet developed confident technical skills, but the most able students show fluent skills in their drawing. There is no difference between boys' and girls' achievement.

221. Students achieve very well. All students build up their understanding of research, analysis and development. They really enjoy the art courses on offer, and many intend to study art further. They benefit from the help teachers give in preparing portfolios and this commitment leads to students working hard. The AVCE course provides very effectively for those students wishing to pursue a more practical programme, and they achieve very well.

Teaching and learning

222. Teaching and learning are very good. Students work hard because of teachers' extremely high expectations. Teachers' knowledge of contemporary art, as well as art history, extends students' learning. Teachers constantly provide very effective support, suggesting new directions and artists, and backing this up with prompts for exhibitions and resource banks. This results in students carrying out a wide range of individual explorations, using different media. In a Year 13 lesson, the variety of responses by students was broad, including exploration of using blown inks for life drawing, and creating a textural tee shirt. Students do not have enough opportunities to discuss and share ideas, or evaluate work. They receive very detailed advice on their next tasks, but do not know their current standard or how to improve their skills, knowledge or understanding. They regularly use computers to modify or create images.

Leadership and management

223. Leadership strives to provide students with the very best, and all staff work hard to achieve this. Teachers of the advanced level groups work closely together, sharing ideas and constantly trying to improve the course. Excellent enrichment activities include daily opportunities to use the art rooms outside lessons, numerous trips to exhibitions, both locally and nationally, and the Barcelona trip in Year 12.

Theatre studies

Provision in theatre studies is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results and standards are improving significantly
- Very good teaching shows skill, imagination, and a high level of demand
- Leadership is very good, and is driving and enthusing students' learning
- Some group rehearsal is too slow to get going

- Some essays lack focus, and appropriate wider reference to theatre

Commentary

Examination results

224. The course is taken by students with very varying levels of drama awareness and experience. Results in A level theatre studies in 2004 were at the national average with boys doing better than girls. Both sexes tended to do less well in theatre studies than in their other subjects. AS results were higher, being well above national average. This reflected a notable increase in students gaining the highest grades, and all gaining at least a grade C.

Standards and achievement

225. The standards of students in the current Year 13 are well above average. Their very good achievement is seen in articulate discussion about theatre and performance, and their confidence when performing. They have considerable experience of live theatre and this enables them to explore ideas about staging and presentation because they are so aware of alternative interpretations. Most can readily make the link between theory and practice, and use each to inform the other. Trust, cooperation and support are of a high order. Written work shows significant progress, although formal timed essays remain a weakness compared to the lengthy and lively coursework pieces. The highest attaining students show very good ability to relate a text to its writer's time and beliefs, and to other parallel or contrasting texts. Some average attaining students write engagingly but without sufficient focus to the essay topic. Whilst group rehearsal is good, some students take too long working out the main focus of a task and so lessen the amount of time they have to explore their ideas.

Teaching and Learning

226. Teaching is very good. Students are learning drama skills and theory very effectively. This is because teachers are adept at stimulating their interest and enthusiasm. Approaches are imaginative and much is expected of students in terms of effort and standards. They are expected to think, and allowed to explore and justify their own ideas and responses. Quality, open-ended questioning is a key strategy in this. Warm-ups are lively and enjoyable, with excellent use of music to set tone or rhythm. Both practical tasks and essays are challenging and are set against the backdrop of a secure understanding of the conventions of theatre, and the implications of genre. Lessons generally move at a good pace, with a successful balance and variety of methods. Teachers allow some students too much time in rehearsal to talk through ideas, roles and the use of props rather than experimenting with these and then evaluating their effectiveness. On occasions when the pace is too unvarying, students get too little time to reflect on their own and others' performance. Marking and advice are regular, thorough, and very appropriate to the needs of the individual student, though insufficient guidance is given on how to write relevant and well-structured essays under timed conditions.

Leadership and management

227. Very good and energetic leadership has overseen a review of the course and how it is taught. This has helped teachers and students alike to feel enthusiastic about, and committed to, drama. Students get a rich and varied diet of live theatre, and take an active part in various school productions. They are very appreciative of what the course has to offer. Management is good, and some analysis of what students do best has improved understanding of what needs to be focused on.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

Provision in physical education is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very enthusiastic teaching has a significant impact on students' achievement
- Very positive relationships and students' attitudes contribute to a culture of learning
- The lack of available ICT resources has an impact on the amount of research students can carry out

Commentary

Examination results

228. A level results were well above average in 2004. Over half the students entered achieved A or B grades, a vast improvement from the previous year, and all students achieved a pass. At AS level, a quarter achieved the highest grades and eighty per cent gained a pass.

Standards and achievement

229. A level students understand the principles of different types of coaching technique very well. They have a clear theoretical and practical knowledge of how to help individuals learn and develop new skills. They know how to analyse the influence of sporting organisations on the development of elite athletes and understand very well about comparative issues concerning the development of sports in the USA, Australia and the United Kingdom. They have achieved a very good understanding of how particular sports have developed individual characteristics to match their environment, such as Australian Rules football and American Football.

Teaching and learning

230. Teachers are extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic and this has a great bearing on the quality of learning. Students have very positive attitudes and are eager to learn. This helps to build very good relationships and it helps students' achievements. Teachers plan interesting lessons using a range of activities and focus on examination technique so students are fully aware of the marks allocated to each answer. Students learn in a variety of ways including individual work, group work and whole class activities. Teachers make sure that students are able to develop their strengths and work on weaknesses by arranging discussion groups according to individual needs. ICT is used for research during lessons but classes have to share the network room with other classes and this limits research opportunities.

Leadership and management

231. The department evaluates its work effectively and this leads to an improvement plan with a clear focus on improving standards. As in the main school, the difficulties of communication between sites impacts on the speed with which changes can be implemented. Recent years have seen far more students achieving the higher grades at A level.

BUSINESS

Economics was the focus for inspection. Business studies was a sampled subject. In the lesson observed, teaching and learning were very good and all students were thoroughly focused. Challenging questions by the teacher led to high standards

Economics

Provision in economics is very good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge and clear focus on examination criteria is a major factor in students' achievement
- Very good leadership is reflected in clear departmental policy documents and well planned schemes of work
- Good links have been established with local companies, which enhance the curriculum
- Access to ICT is limited, which restricts the activities that can be included in lessons

Commentary

Examination results

232. A level results in 2004 were well above the national average, with a good proportion of students achieving high grades. AS results for 2004 were below average, as a significant proportion of students did not achieve a grade.

Standards and achievement

233. Standards seen during the inspection in Years 12 and 13 were well above the national average. Students of widely differing ability are making very good progress. Students' factual knowledge is very good, they are very articulate and are able to discuss and apply economic theory to a variety of scenarios. The achievement of current Year 12 students is good because they are challenged and engaged by the work they are doing. Students make very good progress due to well-planned lessons, which focus on examination criteria. Students use economic theory confidently in a range of different case studies.

Teaching and learning

234. Teaching is very good. Teachers show a very good knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject and have made extensive links with local businesses. They have a secure understanding of examination criteria and use this to structure their teaching effectively. As a result students make very good progress and develop their learning skills well. Relationships are very good. Accommodation has not kept pace with the expansion of the subject and access to ICT is limited. This restricts teaching and learning styles.

Leadership and management

235. Leadership is very good and management is good. There is a strong commitment to improvement and to providing the best for students. The strong links with local businesses and the departmental curriculum enrichment programme contribute positively to students' learning programmes.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

236. The complementary studies course in Year 12 provides students with an effective range of additional and enrichment experiences, including the statutory religious education requirement. Students are well prepared for higher education as part of an effective careers and higher education development programme. In Year 13, some students continue with general studies and successfully achieve good results in the A level examination.

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	3
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	8	8
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	3
Overall standards achieved		3
Students' achievement	2	3
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		3
Attendance	3	3
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	3
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	2	3
How well students learn	2	3
The quality of assessment	3	4
How well the curriculum meets students needs	4	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for students	3	4
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		3
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
The effectiveness of management	3	3

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