

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE HOLT SCHOOL**

Wokingham

LEA area: Wokingham

Unique reference number: 110058

Headteacher: Mrs P Nunn

Lead inspector: W J Powell

Dates of inspection: 10-14 January 2005

Inspection number: 268968

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

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### **Terms used in this report**

*Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are at **Key Stage 3**, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are at **Key Stage 4** of their education. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the **sixth form**, in Years 12 and 13. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for pupils and students of all ages at school.*

*At the end of Year 9, pupils aged 14 take national tests in the **core subjects** of English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the pupils know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, pupils aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**) or the National Vocational Qualification (**NVQ**). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to these awards, including the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (**AVCE**), or to those of the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (**A-level**). Students may take examinations leading to the Advanced Subsidiary award (**AS**), equivalent to half the difficulty of the full A-level, which is gained by further study beyond AS standard. Some students may also take Advanced Extension Awards (**AEA**).*

*Inspectors judge the **standards** reached by pupils by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for pupils of the same age nationally. The pupils' **achievements** reflect whether they are doing well enough. These judgements take account of the educational **value added** over time. In this report, **similar schools** are defined as those having similar standards at the start of each stage of learning.*

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive  
School category: Community  
Age range of pupils: 11 to 18  
Sex of pupils: Female  
Number on roll: 1255

School address: Holt Lane  
Wokingham  
Postcode: RG41 1EE

Telephone number: 0118 978 0165  
Fax number: 0118 989 0831

Appropriate authority: Governing body  
Name of chair of Mrs J Higgins  
governors:

Date of previous 14 September 1998  
inspection:

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This single sex community comprehensive school has 1255 girls aged 11 to 18, including 223 in the sixth form; both figures are larger than average. The school was re-designated as a second phase specialist language college in 2003. It is also a Beacon and a Training School, holds Designated Recommending Body status for teacher training, and the Artsmark and Sportsmark Awards. It was granted a Schools Achievement Award in 2001, and is also holds a Healthy School Award. It draws its pupils from 32 primary schools in the surrounding area, which has markedly less social and economic disadvantage than average. The standards at entry to the main school are above average. The standards of the pupils at present in Year 7 were well above average in English, mathematics and science on entry. In other subjects, standards were nearer average. The entry standards for sixth form courses are similar to those in sixth forms nationally. Most pupils are from white British backgrounds. The relatively small numbers of pupils from other backgrounds are primarily of Asian or mixed heritage. No pupil has English as an additional language. There are no traveller pupils, refugees or asylum seekers. There are 64 pupils on the school's register of pupils with special educational needs. Of these, nine are at the School Action Plus stage and 13 have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, mostly for specific or moderate learning needs. These are well below average figures. About one in 20 pupils joins or leaves the school other than at the usual times; this is not a major factor in the school's work. Almost all of the teaching posts are filled by permanent appointments.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3174	W J Powell	Lead inspector	
11575	C Fish	Lay inspector	
15849	P Buzzing	Team inspector	
11508	C Griffin	Team inspector	English 11-18
23031	I Knight	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-18
22691	R Woodhouse	Team inspector	Science 11-16; physics 16 - 18
15051	L Kaufmann	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-16
18638	C Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology 11-18; citizenship 11-16
21975	A King	Team inspector	Modern languages 11-16; French 16-18
2740	B Barratt	Team inspector	History 11-16; special educational needs; psychology 16-18
32178	J Shears	Team inspector	Geography 11-16; travel and tourism 16-18
10759	L Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education 11-16; Sociology 16-18
10053	J Simms	Team inspector	Art and design 11-18, English as an additional language
31673	J Gwyer-Roberts	Team inspector	Music 11-16
22590	R Castle	Team inspector	Physical education 11-16

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The effectiveness of the school is very good.** Achievement is very good at all levels of the school because of the strengths in teaching and learning. In relation to its income, the school offers very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Between entry at Year 7 and GCSEs in Year 11, pupils add far more value than in most schools nationally; they get much better examination results than would be expected.
- Achievement in Years 10 and 11 in English, and in art and design, is outstanding.
- Teaching and learning are very good across almost all subjects, and at all levels of the school.
- Assessment is a major strength of the school's work, and demonstrates how it seeks to maximise the progress of pupils as individuals.
- The school provides very good pastoral care and academic support for its pupils.
- The school is very well led, not just by senior staff, but across a wide range of other areas of its work.
- The curriculum, whilst satisfactory, needs refreshing to reflect changed demands and greater flexibility, particularly for those aged 14 to 19.
- The school's programme of enrichment is excellent.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, with standards continuing to rise, and a further improvement in teaching quality. In relation to other schools, standards have risen further. Apart from still not meeting the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, there has been significant progress on all of the key issues from the previous report. However, shortcomings in accommodation still limit learning opportunities in some areas, in spite of some substantial building works.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A	A	A	A
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	A	A	A	

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

**Achievement is very good at all levels of the school.** Standards are well above average overall in Years 9, 11 and in the sixth form. The school's academic results in tests and in examinations have risen, both in relation to all schools nationally and to similar schools. At the end of Year 9, national test results have been well above average in English, mathematics and science in recent years. The school's GCSE results have also been well above average overall. In relation to the standards when pupils entered the school in 1999, the GCSE results in 2004 were in the best five per cent nationally in terms of the value added that they represent. Inspection evidence reflects these findings. In Years 10 and 11,

achievement in English and in art and design is outstanding, reflecting the great strengths of teaching in these subjects, and the excellent use that they make of assessment data. The school's sixth form results are amongst the best in the country. At all levels, the very good achievement is reflected in the fact that pupils and students make great strides in their learning during their time at the school, broadening and deepening their competence in a wide range of subjects, and in a manner that is unusually consistent.

**The pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good overall.** There has been improvement in this area since the previous inspection. Behaviour around the school and in almost all lessons is very good. Attendance and attitudes to work and education are good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education is very good overall, as is the quality of teaching and learning in all years.** Assessment is a particular area of strength, and helps to motivate pupils through clear targets. The professionalism and careful planning of the staff are matched by the high expectations that most pupils have of what they should achieve at school, and very good and productive relationships. The curriculum is satisfactory, but is dated, and now needs some attention to reflect changes in what is expected of schools; enrichment is excellent. The school cares for its pupils very well, and enjoys a very good partnership with parents. Partnerships with other schools, colleges and the community are good.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**The quality of leadership and management is very good.** Governors, senior staff and others with responsibility provide very good direction for the school's work. The school is very good at monitoring and evaluating how well it works; management is very good. The school does not meet statutory requirements in respect of collective worship.

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

Pupils and parents see this as a very good school, which is well led, offers very good teaching, and challenges its pupils and students to do well. Inspectors agree. Parents were happy about behaviour matters, but some pupils expressed concern. Whilst inspectors agree that a very small group of pupils does not behave well, the overall picture is that behaviour is very good.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The most important thing the school should do to improve is:

- refresh the curriculum at all levels of the school, including the sixth form, to reflect both the vision of the headteacher, and the changing demands, and opportunities for flexibility, now evident.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT THE HOLT SCHOOL

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The effectiveness of the sixth form is very good.** Standards have improved since the previous inspection, and achievement is very good across most subjects. Teaching and learning are very good, and the sixth form is very well led. The sixth form offers very good cost effectiveness, although accommodation limits some aspects of sixth form work.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Assessment is very well used to provide targets for sixth formers and to monitor their progress towards them.
- Standards are notably higher than would be expected given the broadly typical standards at entry to the sixth form.
- Teaching and learning are very good, and bring about very good achievement. Students regard the school as a very good place in which to learn.
- The relationships between sixth formers, and with their teachers, are very good, and enhance work in the classroom.
- Sixth formers receive very good support during their time in the school.
- Whilst the curriculum is satisfactory, the school has not yet made much progress on broadening opportunities through partnership with other institutions.

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

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>Very good in English literature</b> , with very good teaching bringing about very good achievement from a wide-ranging entry profile. Written work needs more attention. <b>Very good in French</b> , where very good teaching is based on excellent subject knowledge and very good planning, coupled with high expectations. Students become independent learners.
Mathematics	<b>Very good in mathematics.</b> Very good achievement comes from rigorous teaching based on high expectations.
Science	<b>Very good in physics.</b> Students respond well to very good teaching, and produce well above average standards of work.
Information and communication technology	<b>Satisfactory for the Year 12 ICT key skills programme.</b> Consistently well planned lessons ensure good teaching and learning but assessment could be used more effectively to set targets for students.
Humanities	<b>Very good in psychology.</b> Achievement is very good because very good teaching and learning demonstrate very good use of assessment data. <b>Good in sociology.</b> Teaching and achievement are good, leading to above average standards, and a good understanding of theoretical traditions.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<b>Good in design and technology.</b> Independent learning is well fostered by the very good teaching, but assessment could be better used in some areas.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Very good in art and design.</b> Well above average standards and very good achievement reflect very good partnership between students and staff, in



spite of inadequate accommodation for this level of work.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel **Good in vocational travel and tourism.** The new course has got off to a good start, with good teaching, although students need more opportunities for first-hand contact with the leisure industry.

Business *Sampled lessons in business studies and economics show very good teaching, and an excellent awareness of examination requirements that is used well to raise standards and gain very good achievement.*

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

## **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Students receive very good pastoral support, based on very good monitoring of their progress by teachers. Students welcome the greater sense of partnership with staff at this level. Induction arrangements are very good.

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

**The sixth form is very well led**, and recent restructuring is working well, with close partnership between the sixth form team and senior staff. Curriculum leadership is also very good; planning is based upon thorough evaluation of how well the students perform. However, the statutory requirement for daily collective worship is not met.

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

Students feel that they have a good say in how the school is run. They see this as a very good school, feel that they work well with teachers, and expect to be stretched and to do well. Inspectors agree with these views.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

*Achievement is very good in all years. Standards are well above average in Years 9, 11 and 13.*

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although entry standards in Year 7 are already above average, pupils go on to do much better than expected by Year 11.
- Achievement is very good at all levels of the school because of very good teaching, and the very good use of assessment to target improvement by individuals.
- Achievement by Year 11 is excellent in English, and in art and design.
- The very good achievement reflects both a broadening and a deepening of learning and skills as the girls move up the school.
- The consistency of achievement across subjects is a particular strength of the school.
- Recent improvements mean that standards in ICT are rising well, but still lag behind those in other subjects.

#### Commentary

1. When pupils enter the main school, standards are above average overall. The Year 6 test results for the most recent entrants show well above average scores in English, mathematics and science. Standards are more variable in other subjects, although at least average. On entry to the sixth form, standards are broadly average in terms of the GCSE profiles of the students following courses; the school's entrance requirements for the sixth form are similar to schools elsewhere

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	37.6 (36.5)	n/a (33.4)
mathematics	39.1 (40.1)	n/a (35.4)
science	37.1 (37.7)	n/a (33.6)

*There were 204 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

2. The results of national tests at the end of Year 9 have been consistently well above the average for all schools nationally since the previous inspection, both overall and in each of English, mathematics and science tests. In 2003, the last year for which validated national data are available, the overall results were above average in comparison with similar schools. The trend in overall results has been one of steady improvement since the previous inspection; there have been some fluctuations from year to year within subjects, particularly in English, but they have remained at well above average levels compared to all schools nationally. Provisional data for 2004 suggest that English results have shown a considerable improvement on recent years' figures when compared with similar schools. When individual pupils' results are compared with their test scores in Year 6 three years previously, the value added is

above average; they gained better results in Year 9 tests than would be expected, and thus achieved well. The school's targets at this level were appropriately high, given the school's intake profile. They were met in 2004 in English and mathematics, but science fell slightly short of its target.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	84 (87)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99 (97)	89 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	46.9 (46.2)	34.9 (34.7)

*There were 199 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. Since the previous inspection, the pattern of overall results at the GCSE examination at the end of Year 11 has been consistently well above average when compared with all schools nationally, including those in 2004. When compared to similar schools, results are well above average; the pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. When the 2004 GCSE results are compared with individual pupils' Year 6 test scores in 1999, the first time this has been possible, the value added is excellent, and in the highest five per cent of schools nationally.
4. In 2003, the latest year for which validated comparative data are available, pupils gained significantly above average GCSE results in all subjects, including English, mathematics and science. When the pattern of individual pupils' results is examined, they tended to do significantly better in drama and geography than in the other subjects that they took. They tended to do significantly less well in mathematics, dual certificate science, and in design and technology. Overall, however, there is much less variation between subject results than is usually seen.

**Main school**

5. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average overall in Years 9 and 11. This represents very good achievement at both stages because the pupils raise the standards of their work to consistently well above average levels across a wide range of subjects. They also deepen the quality of their learning, particular in terms of the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation that are needed to gain high grades. In recent years, the school's improvement plan has given emphasis to the key role of assessment in raising standards. It is working well. Pupils and parents are right when they say that this as a school where pupils are expected to do well.
6. Standards of work seen are average in Year 9 in citizenship, and above average in modern languages, ICT, design and technology, and in physical education. In all other subjects, standards at this level are well above average. Standards of work seen are very high in Year 11 in art and design, and average in citizenship and core physical education. They are above average in modern languages, and in core ICT, but well above average in all other subjects. In a few cases, observed standards are below those seen at examination. This reflects the school's strengths in preparing pupils for

examinations as they draw near, in particular through an explicit focus on examination assessment criteria.

7. Achievement is excellent in Years 10 and 11 in English and in art and design. In both cases, the subjects lay strong foundations in Years 7 to 9. Exemplary use of assessment, coupled with great strengths in teaching, particularly in creating the belief that the highest standards are within reach, combine to produce a blossoming of performance in the GCSE years. In almost all other subjects, including mathematics and science, achievement is very good in all years. Once again, assessment and target setting are well used by teachers to drive up standards; they create motivated pupils who wish to learn and to do well. In a few cases, achievement falls below this generally very good picture. Achievement is good in all years in ICT, reflecting some problems in staffing, timetabling, and equipping the subject in the past, whilst accommodation and timetabling factors limit achievement, although still good, in physical education in Years 7 to 9, and in GCSE work. In core physical education lessons in Years 10 and 11, achievement is no more than satisfactory because of limited time, and the pressure on facilities. Achievement in history in Years 10 and 11 is good rather than very good because of some weaknesses in essay work.
8. Standards of literacy and of numeracy are well above average. Entering with well above average standards of literacy, pupils learn techniques such as skim reading and analysis of text to make their learning efficient and effective across the subject range. Moreover, careful development of the skills needed for high quality essay work have also helped to raise standards across subjects. Numeracy skills are developed across a wide range of subjects; pupils are confident users of numerical information, and use data well to support their learning. Standards of use of ICT are above average, reflecting the relative lack of specialist teaching of the subject until recently. However, improvements to how the subject is taught, and better equipment, are combining to raise standards.
9. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well. They make very good progress in reaching their individual targets and in improving their reading ages. Their confidence, self esteem and interpersonal skills improve significantly. Their progress is carefully monitored and they achieve as well as other pupils in all subjects, with particularly good achievement in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, music, and religious education. They gain appropriate results at GCSE. The gifted and talented pupils also achieve very well. They are carefully identified as part of the school's detailed recording system, and their personal targets are set appropriately high. Their achievements are evident in the school's performance at the highest grades.

## **Sixth form**

### **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	100 (97.1)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	68.7 (50.1)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per pupil	335.5 (315.3)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 120 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

10. Since the previous inspection, the overall pattern of results at A-level and AVCE at the end of Year 13 has been one of improvement from year to year, and has been well

above the average for all schools nationally. Provisional results show this continuing in 2004; in terms of overall pass rate, the school was one of the most successful in the country, with all students gaining at least grade E in every subject. The school's own analyses show that students tend to do better at examination in Year 13 than would be expected from their prior GCSE profiles, and that there is less variation of value added from subject to subject than in most schools. In 2003, the latest year for which validated national data are available, results were in the highest five per cent of schools nationally in physics and in sociology. They were above average in design and technology, and in English literature, average in French and German, but well below average in drama. In other subjects, results were well above average. The provisional results for 2004 show an upward movement in this pattern, with drama and French being above average, for example.

11. In work seen, standards are well above average overall for Year 13, and students are achieving very well in relation to their prior attainments at GCSE. Observed standards are very high in physics, well above average in art and design, and above average in most of the other focus subjects during the inspection. Standards in the new travel and tourism course are average at this stage. As in the main school, it is clear that where standards lie below recent examination performance, careful examination preparation in the schemes of work will provide the lift required. For example, some excellent work of this type was seen in business studies, where students were being prepared for an imminent examination.
12. In the work seen, achievement was good in sociology, and on the new travel and tourism course, and very good in all other subjects, reflecting the very thorough foundations laid in the main school, and very good teaching that challenges students to do very well. The sixth form uses a number of statistically-based tools to predict and monitor the progress that students make. The targets set for them are demanding, and prove a strong motivating force for most students. As in the main school, students are developing strong skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, all needed for higher grades, and real understanding.
13. Although the school does not run formal key skills courses in communication, and in application of number, standards of literacy and numeracy amongst sixth formers are well above average. These skills are reflected in the quality of writing and analysis seen during the inspection. Standards in ICT are average; students undertake a key skills course in Year 12, which provides them with a suitable range of skills appropriate to the needs of their other courses.

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

*The pupils and students have good attitudes to school life. Their behaviour is very good. Attendance is good. The personal development of pupils, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good overall.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The pupils and students behave very well and this helps to ensure that the school is a well ordered place to be.
- Very good relationships help the school to run smoothly.
- Overall, the pupils and students are enthusiastic about learning, but a few sometimes lack a fully developed commitment to learning.

- Pupils and students willingly take on the roles of responsibility open to them.
- There is a commendably low level of unauthorised absences.
- The pupils' personal development has improved significantly since the previous inspection.

## **Commentary**

### ***Main school***

14. Although behaviour was identified by some pupils as an area of concern, that seen during the inspection was very good overall. The pupils are fully aware of the school's expectations and, most of the time, meet them. They cope very well with some very cramped conditions and move around the school in an orderly way. Break times are pleasant and relaxed. Behaviour is not a problem in most lessons. Pupils who experience real difficulties with their behaviour receive support through individual strategies overseen by senior staff. The level of exclusions has risen since the previous inspection, reflecting a culture where rights are known without a corresponding understanding of the responsibilities of being part of a community. Good procedures are in place for temporarily excluded pupils to return to school.

**Ethnic background of pupils****Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	874	33	1
White – Irish	5	0	0
White – any other White background	23	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	11	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	13	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	16	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	4	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	8	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	261	0	0

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

15. Pupils enjoy very good relationships between themselves and with staff. This, together with the very good attitudes seen, contributes significantly to the very good learning and achievement seen at all levels of the school. In lessons, pupils are happy to support each other, are willing to share resources and to co-operate in group and paired activities. Around school, there are high levels of mutual respect and it is a calm place to be. Although the school and the pupils acknowledge that bullying exists, measures both to tackle it and to raise awareness are perceived as clear and very effective. No forms of racial or other harassment have been notified to the school in recent times.
  
16. The pupils' attitudes to school are good on the whole. Nearly every pupil involves herself in at least one activity outside the classroom and many take on several. They take an interest in what is going on around them; for example, fund raising events for the tsunami appeal were organised spontaneously. In lessons they mostly enjoy what they are learning and want to do well, although they are occasionally too passive and dependent upon the teacher. Also, there is a very small group of older pupils which really enjoys more vocational courses such as child development, whilst having problems in other, often more academic, ones, where they sometimes engage in deliberately disruptive activities. Pupils with special educational needs are very positive about their learning. They participate fully and work hard in lessons, taking pride in their success. There are several positions of responsibility within each class, and these are taken on willingly by the pupils. The school's house system plays an effective part in developing a sense of community as well as providing opportunities for pupils to be captains, representatives and monitors for various house activities. Year 11 pupils play a very successful part in helping the Year 7 pupils to settle into school life.



### **Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%) 2003/2004**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.5	School data	0.2
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

17. Attendance is good because the pupils enjoy school. The school has set itself a target of 94% attendance for this year and is monitoring it carefully. School administrative staff and heads of year conscientiously check that the reason for any absence is valid, resulting in a low level of unauthorised absence. The educational welfare officer is involved well in any cases where attendance is a concern.
18. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, and has improved since the previous inspection. Spiritual development was judged unsatisfactory in the last report, but progress has been made and this area is now satisfactory. Departments are now identifying spiritual opportunities in their schemes of work, for example. Cultural development is good and is particularly well established in art where there is a strong focus on the art of different cultures. In music and modern foreign languages, good coverage of different cultures is planned effectively in schemes of work. English also makes a very good contribution to pupils' understanding of our own literary heritage and a wider multi-cultural dimension. Pupils' social development continues to be very good, as there are ample opportunities through enrichment, including visits, planned events, and extra curricular activities. Many subjects make a strong contribution through lessons, for example in English, science, art, music, and design and technology, where pupils showed very good support for each other. Pupils' moral development is very good, and is seen in a wide range of contexts. For example, it is very well supported in geography by looking at factors about life in shanty towns, in physical education by playing fair to the rules, in history by looking at anti-Semitism, and in science by studying the morals of genetics.
19. The specialist language college provides many valuable opportunities for pupils and students to enhance their cultural and social development by participating in exchanges and study visits to Europe. A link with a school in China has just been set up, which has the potential to broaden their experience still further. The pupils have further useful insights into other cultures, particularly in geography, through e-mail links with Mexico and a videophone link with an aid-worker in Afghanistan.

### **Sixth form**

20. Students have clear ideas of what they want to achieve in the sixth form and thus they attend well; the course completion rate is high. The school keeps a close watch on attendance and quickly follows up any concerns with the students and their parents.
21. Many students choose to stay in the sixth form for their studies because of the very good results achieved by the school. They show good attitudes to the school and to their learning. They want to do well and mostly they work hard. However, there are occasions where incomplete homework, insufficient preparation and an unwillingness to read beyond what is required, shows a lack of real enthusiasm for the subject and an under-developed sense of enquiry and curiosity. Overall, however, the very good attitudes to study, and the very good relationships between students, and with staff, contribute very well to the achievement of sixth formers.

22. Sixth formers take on responsibilities readily and reliably. Some take on the role of prefect and are involved in the organisation of charity and house events. They form an important part of the anti-bullying forum, help in classrooms and support extra curricular activities such as in drama, dance and music.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

*The quality of education is very good. Teaching, learning, care and guidance are all very good. The curriculum is satisfactory, but enrichment is excellent. The partnership with parents is very good, and links with the community and other schools are good.*

### Teaching and learning

*Teaching and learning are very good at all levels of the school, as is assessment.*

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The consistency of the quality of teaching and learning across subjects is a major strength of the school, and is reflected in the achievement seen at all levels.
- The teachers have a very good knowledge of the subjects that they teach, and use assessment information very well to plan and target work.
- The school's assessment arrangements are very good, and this is a key factor in the very good achievement that is seen across the school. Practice in English is outstanding.
- Pupils and students enjoy very good relationships with each other and with their teachers, promoting very good learning.
- Most pupils want to learn, and expect their teachers to place demands upon them.
- In a few lessons, the range of learning opportunities could have been better.

### Commentary

#### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 158 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
14 (9%)	62 (39%)	51 (32%)	27 (17%)	3 (2%)	-	-

*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.*

### Main school

23. The surveys of pupils and parents show that they value the quality of the teaching, and in particular the degree of challenge that is offered. They are right to do so, as the very good teaching at all levels of the school, and across almost all subjects, is a major reason for the very good achievement seen during the inspection.
24. The consistency of the teaching, and the learning associated with it, reflects key management decisions. First, the school is staffed slightly more generously than usual, often with part-timers, as a matter of deliberate policy. This means that when cover is needed, for example for maternity leave, it is usually possible to reallocate teaching to ensure that pupils are taught by staff who understand the school's expectations and who know the pupils. Second, there are robust systems to ensure that the school's

policies and procedures are implemented, and backed by a very good approach to assessment that produces careful analyses of individual pupils' value added performances to show where further work is needed.

25. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is very good in all subjects apart from design and technology, and physical education, where it is good. In Year 10 lessons seen, teaching was good in history and physical education, excellent in English and in art and design. It was very good in all other subjects including mathematics and science. An impressive feature is that cases of very good or excellent teaching and learning were seen in all subjects; the strengths are widespread.
26. There were three lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory, all in Year 10, but in different subjects. The common feature was the same very small group of girls who were determined not to learn, and who constantly challenged the teacher. Instead of following the school's clear procedures in such cases, the teachers tried to battle on, but never managed to secure complete control of the lesson. The same girls were seen in action in other lessons, but firmer handling at an early stage caused less loss of learning. Even in the unsatisfactory lessons, the many strengths of the learning culture, evident in the overwhelming majority of pupils, meant that achievement was at least satisfactory for most pupils; they do not accept the unacceptable behaviour of the very few. Lessons that were no more than satisfactory tended to lack the range of learning styles seen elsewhere, and in particular, did not use question and answer work well enough. Where questions were used, they were often answered by the teacher, rather than being used as a probe to secure understanding. Pupils tended to play little part in their own learning.
27. Far more common were the lessons where teaching and learning were excellent, all of which occurred in Years 9 and 10. This shows how the cumulative effects of the school's work in earlier years bears fruit as the girls become older. Of the nine excellent lessons in the main school, four were in modern languages, two in geography and in art, and one in English. These lessons showed, to an even greater degree, the many strengths of teaching and learning across the school, with its overall very good standard of teaching and learning. An excellent Year 10 geography lesson reflected the key points that were seen in many others; high energy teaching, powerful group work, and peer learning, leading to a very sophisticated understanding of the topic.
28. The teachers' subject knowledge is a major strength of most lessons; they develop a strong factual base of learning, and then use skilled question and answer work to encourage the pupils to think more widely and more deeply. Lesson planning is also a great strength, with a good range of activities that recognise the pupils' individual strengths and weaknesses. These are usually delivered in a manner that is demanding; teaching is usually well-paced, and thus interest is maintained, and lessons maintain a sharpness of activity. The learning culture is strong; almost all pupils push their teachers hard. They want to learn, and enjoy being put under pressure. Many teachers make very good use of mini-whiteboards to maintain participation and to check, constantly, on the progress being made. This continues into sixth form work.
29. Basic skills are taught well. Literacy is promoted successfully, and teachers develop very good learning skills in the pupils, such as skim reading to make learning more efficient. Numeracy is also promoted well, with widespread use of mathematical skills in other subjects. The teachers have also developed good ICT skills, and are now making greater use of e-learning approaches to develop the growing skills of the

pupils. However, this strand lags somewhat behind the development of literacy and numeracy.

30. Pupils with special educational needs are taught very well. Individuals' learning needs are well known, approaches are strongly inclusive, and teachers use a range of effective strategies to meet learning requirements. Specialist teaching is very good, and teaching of the pupils is also very good in English, design and technology, music, and in Years 7 to 9, in religious education. Pupils' progress is closely monitored through the regular review of their progress in consultation with subject teachers, and of the achievement of their targets on individual education plans. The objectives set in Statements of Special Educational Needs are fulfilled well and annual reviews are carried out very thoroughly.
31. A major factor behind the school's high value added rating is the fact that it focuses, sharply, on how well pupils perform as individuals. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment procedures are very good, and have improved significantly since the previous inspection. This very good progress reflects the very clear direction for the development of assessment provided by the senior management team. The school makes very good use of an unusually wide range of data to establish pupils' attainments, used in the setting of targets, and in monitoring them. These data include: results from national tests at the end of Years 6 and 9; reading ages; information from tests that assess verbal, non-verbal and numerical abilities; other commercial value added systems; and in the case of a number of subjects, school-based subject key assessment tasks. The school has embarked on a carefully planned programme to raise the impact of assessment even further, with clear expectations of, and guidance to, teachers. The school evaluates the impact of its work carefully, through a scheduled series of monitoring activities focused in issues such as: the quality of written feedback; self assessment; and teaching that is based on clear assessment objectives.
32. The above procedures are used very well to respond to individual needs. The extremely effective use of targets ensures that subject teachers are very well-informed about the prior and potential attainments of the pupils. This enables them to pitch expectations appropriately. Pupils with special educational needs receive teaching that is tailored to meet their needs. Those who are particularly gifted and/or talented also achieve very well because teaching is matched to their potential. All pupils are set targets in terms of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. The monitoring of pupils' targets is done by senior staff, staff with responsibilities for care, and subject teachers. Formal and scheduled mid-year and end of year reviews ensure that the monitoring process is highly systematic.
33. The pupils' understanding of how they can improve is very good but greater consistency is required from subject to subject. Practice in English is outstanding:

#### ***Example of outstanding practice***

**An excellent English department that uses data rigorously to gain results that are very high in relation to similar schools, even though it has well above average standards on entry to Year 7.**

The department's rigorous assessment procedures, well known to the whole team, have had a major impact on the pupils' learning and achievement. Teachers closely analyse the pupils' standards on entry to the school through a range of assessments: end of Year 6 SAT results; objective tests; reading ages; and the department's own assessment tasks. This process is repeated with older pupils using other appropriate data such as YELLIS. The analyses lead to the identification of challenging National Curriculum level, or GCSE grade, targets.

At any given time pupils know precisely their targets and what they must do to achieve them. Excellent marking that identifies ways to improve then builds upon this process. Frequent and substantial key assessment tasks provide a comprehensive picture of how well pupils are doing in relation to targets and external norms. This enables the English team to identify quickly any pupils falling short of their targets, triggering rapid and highly effective intervention. More usually, improvement brings about an upward revision of targets. Frequent opportunities for self assessment, using explicit test and examination criteria, sharpen the

pupils' understanding of how standards are determined. The teachers' rigorous statistical analysis of test and examination performance highlights problem areas; it effectively guides amendments to schemes of work and teaching. Very good achievement by Year 9 pupils, and excellent achievement in Year 11, emerge from these excellent procedures.

Very good understanding of how to improve is apparent in ICT, art, geography, music, business studies, and religious education. In these subjects, assessment throughout lessons is highly effective, often making good use of mini-whiteboards to gain quick feedback. Elsewhere, the pupils' understanding is generally good. Many subjects are consolidating pupils' understanding of how to improve through an increased emphasis on self assessment.

### ***Sixth form***

34. The strengths of teaching and learning in the sixth form mirror the picture in the main school. During the week of inspection, a significant number of lessons dealt with revision in preparation for imminent examinations. This inevitably limited the range of teaching seen in some classrooms. However, after examination of the students' work, and listening to the evident quality of their learning, it is clear that very good teaching is a key and normal characteristic of sixth form life. The sixth form has the highest proportion of very good or excellent lessons in the school. Well over half of Year 12 and 13 lessons showed teaching and learning of this quality, but especially so in Year 13, which builds upon the foundations of learning established in Year 12.
35. Teachers make very good use of the wider than usual range of assessment information available. They have a clear picture of the students' targets and their progress towards them. As in the main school, this results in very well planned lessons, delivered by knowledgeable specialists. Planning for an excellent Year 13 psychology lesson drew upon such data to produce groups that contained students of different abilities. The very good relationships seen in so much sixth form work allows such grouping to promote effective learning across the range of attainments; students learn from each other as well as from the teacher.
36. As in the main school, students often drive the pace of learning forward at a rapid rate, and teachers also maintain a high degree of intellectual challenge, but also allow for appropriate reflection. In the better lessons, there is much exchange between all those in the classroom; students play a very active part in the work. An excellent Year 13 French lesson showed this taking place in the target language, when the students argued about pollution and transport issues. The teacher, playing Devil's advocate, challenged the students' views vehemently; they rose to this very well.
37. In the relatively few cases where sixth form teaching and learning are no more than satisfactory, the main feature is that the students show little real initiative. The teachers often compound this by telling rather than asking, or by answering their own questions. In these lessons, planning is satisfactory, but lacks the edge seen in most work that proves more stimulating.
38. The very thorough assessment procedures observed in the main school are also apparent in the sixth form. The school uses assessment very effectively to set targets. The students' understanding of how to improve is very good. It is enhanced by: the quality of both written and oral feedback; a clear focus on each subject's assessment objectives; and a very secure knowledge of the criteria required for specific grades.
39. Once GCSE results are published and course choices finalised, students are set very challenging personal targets. Although subjects deploy a range of systems to monitor the students' progress towards their targets, the general quality of monitoring is akin to that observed in psychology, English and business studies: highly systematic and rigorous. Students confirm they are very aware of their target grades, what they need to do to achieve

them, and of how well they are doing. Careful weekly monitoring by both subject teachers and care staff identify any problems such as not meeting deadlines, falling short of standards, and lateness or absence. This enables effective intervention. The students' understanding of how well they are doing is enhanced by an increasing use of self assessment activities. High expectations prevail.

## **The curriculum**

*The breadth of curriculum opportunities is satisfactory in the main school and in the sixth form. Enrichment is excellent. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory overall.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The curriculum is in need of an overhaul to reflect the greater flexibility now available, and to remove some anomalies.
- The school's opportunities for enrichment are outstandingly good.
- Curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- Accommodation, although satisfactory overall, still limits curriculum flexibility too much, and restricts achievement in some subjects.

## **Commentary**

### **Main school**

40. The breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory overall in the main school. Pupils in all years are taught all the required subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. The school's modern foreign languages provision is good in Years 7 to 9, where it builds effectively on the start that a significant proportion of entrants to Year 7 have made on learning French in partner primary schools. All pupils in Years 7 to 9 study two modern languages, and drama is taught as a separate subject. Citizenship has been introduced into the curriculum but as with some other subjects, its development is limited by the constraints of the timetable. Wherever possible, the school allocates additional teachers so that groups can be made smaller: for example, in Year 9 an additional teacher in the humanities area allows for a very small set for pupils who need more help.
41. The school has made relatively little use so far of the growing flexibility in the curriculum from Year 10 onwards. An element of vocational courses will be offered in conjunction with a local college of further education from September 2005. Overall, the school's plans for a widened range of provision across the 14 to 19 age range are less well advanced than in many schools. In part, this reflects the early stage of joint planning in the area. The school's arrangements for careers education are satisfactory, as is provision for personal, health and social education.
42. The curriculum model used in the main school was created some years ago, and the school has responded to directives and initiatives by adjusting the timetable to fit new features. So, for example, the requirement to cover ICT as a curriculum subject for all pupils was addressed in a variety of ways, giving pupils two periods a fortnight in Year 7, but only one in Year 9. In Year 8, there is no discrete teaching; coverage of ICT is tracked through the core subjects. In part, such compromises have contributed to the limited achievement in the subject in the recent past. For some subjects, piecemeal changes have resulted in uneven allocations of time. For example, geography and history have above average allocations in Year 7, but below average time in Year 8.

Achievement in core physical education in Years 10 and 11 is restricted by the time allocated. In some subjects, grouping arrangements are determined by timetabling rather than subject requirements. In physical education, for example, the pupils are set by ability in Year 9, but the make-up of their classes in Years 10 and 11 is dictated by the sets the pupils are in for modern foreign languages. These sets also determine the grouping in religious education in Years 10 and 11.

43. In short, though the main school curriculum is satisfactory, the framework of the timetable has reached the limits of what stretching, patching and amending can do, particularly given limitations imposed by accommodation. Though achievement is at least good in almost all subjects, the timetable now results in anomalies that reduce learning opportunities, and hinders some subjects from becoming centres of excellence. Now that some progress has been made on accommodation, the thinking behind the curriculum requires a thorough overhaul to reflect concepts such as grouping, the place of e-learning, or of vocational education. The need for a curriculum review is already highlighted in the current year's school improvement plan.
44. In contrast to the shortcomings in the taught curriculum, enrichment is excellent. Pupils are provided with a very wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, and the school monitors the take-up of these. The range of trips and visits is wide, and there are clubs and societies in most subjects. The quality of extra-curricular music is particularly strong. Many departments have become involved in some way in projects that are designed to offer an international dimension in learning. The geography department has an active link with Afghanistan, and through a British doctor working there gets up-to-date information via videophone about life since the fall of the Taliban regime; the girls also raise money to repair and provide equipment for their Afghan twin school. The music department has undertaken a tour to Paris with one of the school choirs. There are further valuable opportunities to enrich the curriculum in the work of several other departments, including an e-mail link with Mexico (geography again), work on great world scientists in science, Arabic cooking in technology, and Japanese glazing and batik in art.
45. The school's arrangements to promote basic skills are very good in literacy. Teachers capitalise on the well above average standards with which the pupils enter the school, and teachers show good awareness of the need to develop specialist vocabulary in their subject, as well as to extend the pupils' use of English in general. There are also good strategies for developing mathematics in other subjects of the curriculum such as design and technology, geography and science.
46. The curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Provision is very well planned to meet pupils' specific learning requirements. All pupils have full access to the whole curriculum. In addition, a range of activities and strategies is provided to enable them to learn effectively across the curriculum, focusing on improving pupils' confidence and supporting individual learning needs, and in Years 10 and 11, on helping pupils to improve organisational and study skills in preparation for GCSE.
47. Staffing in the school is good overall. The school is fully staffed and the match of teachers to the curriculum is good overall. There has been a creative approach to recruitment difficulties, and several of the part time teachers employed by the school have shown willingness to be flexible with the hours they work. Several periods of maternity leave and sickness cover have been resolved by part timers increasing their hours to cover the absence. In this way, the school has maintained a highly committed

and loyal work force. Nearly all teachers have good qualifications that match the subjects they teach, helping to maintain challenge and good achievement. The match of support staff to the needs of the school, and their deployment to subjects, is good, and ensure the smooth running of the school and sound management of its systems.

48. Overall, accommodation in the main school is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the school has made improvements to the accommodation and established a continuing programme of remodelling and refurbishment. Some science laboratories have been refurbished, but there are still too few to allow all teaching of science to take place in laboratories. There are too few music rooms. In physical education, although facilities are satisfactory, there are constraints. The hard play area cannot be used, and the field does not drain well. There are occasions when too many classes are timetabled at one time, so that when the weather is bad, this undermines the physical education programme. In drama, there is one good working area, but the second drama area is unsatisfactory, created as it is from "temporary" huts almost 60 years old. Teachers have adopted strategies to overcome the problems and constraints of accommodation, but in doing so, the potential for excellence in a number of areas is constrained. Although there have been some improvements since the previous inspection, access to most of the site by those with physical or visual impairments is unsatisfactory.
49. Overall, resources are satisfactory. However, in music, there is insufficient access to ICT in Years 7 to 9. The number of computers in school is in line with the number expected nationally. Most departments have adequate resources to support their teaching.

### **Sixth form**

50. The school provides a satisfactory range of courses, at different levels and with a range of learning styles that are suitable for the students staying on to the sixth form. However religious education could still be improved further; this was a key issue at the time of the previous inspection, although the situation has improved. At the time of the inspection, there was no consistent provision for Year 13 students, and the single day conference that students attend in Year 12 can only address a relatively limited range of topics.
51. Students in the sixth form have the same excellent opportunities to enrich their studies as pupils in the main school, and they are very actively involved in the school's life. Careers education is satisfactory. Students receive good guidance about the subjects they might study in the sixth form, and retention rates are high, showing a good match between the subjects chosen and their suitability. Advice for students wishing to apply to universities is thorough and appreciated by the students.
52. Overall, sixth form accommodation and resources are satisfactory; they do not constrain standards and achievement because of the ingenuity of staff, although the accommodation does sometimes limit the learning styles that may be used. The sixth form common room is very cramped, and constrains private study.

### **Care, guidance and support**

*There are very good practices and procedures in place to ensure the care and welfare of the pupils and students. Very good support, advice and guidance are provided for them.*



*There are satisfactory arrangements to take the views of pupils in the main school into account; these arrangements are good in the sixth form.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The very strong pastoral system ensures that all pupils and students are treated as individuals.
- The school has made considerable improvements in its procedures for health and safety.
- The school uses its very good assessment information very effectively to support the pupils and students.
- The sixth form students feel that their views are taken into account well.
- Pupils and students settle very quickly into the school.

### **Commentary**

#### ***Main school***

53. Staff show a genuine interest in the pupils and want to do the very best for them. Very good relationships develop across the whole school community and these underpin the very strong pastoral system in school, which focuses primarily on the individual. Teachers and other staff have a comprehensive understanding of the pupils' individual circumstances and strengths, and where they need to be supported. The pupils speak highly of their form tutors, and particularly of their heads of year, as being very approachable, helpful and supportive. They are encouraged to contact any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable if they have any problems or concerns, and pupils are especially appreciative of this.
54. In the previous report, a number of health and safety issues were raised, all of which have been rectified. The school's current procedures for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of the pupils are very good. Comprehensive risk assessment is in place, first aid is carried out efficiently and effectively, supervision is very good, and the pupils are reminded of the requirements of working safely in subjects such as science and design and technology. Child protection procedures and policies are very thorough, with staff reminded regularly of their responsibilities and the action they must take should they have concerns. Very good attention is given to ensure that pupils looked after in the community are in no way disadvantaged.
55. Teachers use the very good assessment information to help pupils to improve their work. Support and advice are very well targeted, helping all groups of pupils to make the same very good progress. Personal development is less formally assessed, but staff provide very good quality support and advice where this is needed. Careers advice is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and guided. Their learning and personal development needs are clearly identified, and their progress checked through systematic monitoring and assessment, in consultation with subject departments. The very good support of the pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs enables them to make very good progress. Good liaison with Connexions helps pupils to make well informed choices in Years 9 and 11.
56. Pupils and parents are very impressed with the induction programme that helps the Year 7 pupils to settle very quickly into the routines and systems of the school. They say they quickly began to find their way around the school, that older pupils and staff

were very helpful, and that everyone went out of their way to help them become members of the school community. Although there is a school council, with representatives from each year, the pupils do not feel that it is always effective in taking their views into account. Whilst the suggestion that they should be allowed to wear trousers is a notable success for the pupils, as is the request for the toilets to be refurbished, they feel the scope of the council is not broad enough.

### **Sixth form**

57. The students in the sixth form enjoy the same very good levels of pastoral support that they have experienced in the main school. They speak of a less formal relationship with the staff and feel they work more in partnership with them.
58. Assessment information is used very well to help students improve their work. They are impressed with the detailed feedback they receive, and are very appreciative of this support. Individuals are helped if they are experiencing specific difficulties, giving them every opportunity to succeed.
59. The students consider that their views are taken account of well, although generally not through the school council. They feel that the head girl, her deputy and the prefects are good at getting their views across and at getting things done, especially in improving life in the sixth form.
60. Very good arrangements within Year 11 and Year 12 ensure that the students settle quickly into the sixth form. They rapidly adjust to their new environment, but are eager to remain involved in the work of the whole school.

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

*The partnership between the school and the parents is very good. Partnerships with other schools, and with the local community, are good.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good consideration has been given to ensuring that parents are provided with regular information on how their daughters are doing.
- Parents are very happy with the quality of education their daughters receive.
- Parents provide the school with generous support through the parent teacher association and the school fund.
- The language college initiative has significantly increased links with schools and the community.
- Pastoral links with partner primary schools are very good; there are good curriculum links.
- There are satisfactory curriculum links to enhance the curriculum in Years 10 and 11.
- The school makes a very good contribution to charities.

## Commentary

61. Through the OFSTED questionnaire and meeting, parents show a high level of overall satisfaction with the school. They are particularly impressed with the high quality of teaching, the very high expectations set and the good progress their daughters make. They also expressed the view that behaviour is good and that neither bullying nor harassment is a problem. Inspection findings endorsed these positive comments.
62. Parents, however, expressed concern about how the school seeks their views and about the information they receive. Information on how their daughters are doing is provided on a termly basis. The written information, in the form of simple reviews and reports, is of very good quality. Reports identify strengths and areas for improvement, as well as giving a very good insight into personal development, and attitudes to work and school. Parents' evenings and other meetings are well organised. Information about trips, activities and what is going on in school, including the specialist language college, is timely and informative. The school prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents both contain the statutory information required. The school encourages parents to contact staff if there are problems. Staff aim to talk to parents the same day, to prevent problems escalating, even if they cannot resolve the issue at once. Parents are now surveyed annually to see what is important to them, and how well the school meets their needs; this involves them very well in the work of the school. These concerns apart, the school's links with its parents are very good.
63. The special educational needs team works closely with parents, involving them fully in monitoring and reviewing pupils' progress, and target setting for improvement. There is also very close liaison with primary schools in identifying pupils' learning needs on transfer.
64. The parent-teacher association is run by a small, enthusiastic group of parents. The support for the activities it arranges is very good. They serve not just as very efficient ways of raising funds for the school, but also as social events that enable staff and parents to get to know each other, and to develop the home school partnership. The money raised, together with voluntary contributions from parents, supports projects such as the refurbishment of the pupils' and students' toilets, and providing refreshments at school occasions.
65. Partnership with other schools is good overall. As part of the specialist language college initiative, significant numbers of children at the school's partner primary schools are introduced to learning French in Year 6, or in Years 5 and 6, by means of a very well-planned course co-ordinated, resourced, and largely staffed by teachers employed by the school. There is also some early language learning in Spanish for younger children. Local primary school children participate in a very lively festival of languages, which brings Year 6 pupils from all partner schools together to play games, and undertake other activities in French. There are also effective links in art, history, music and science. For instance, pupils from Year 5 visit the school to take part in a 'Science Day', and the school provides support for primary school musical events. In the primary schools, both boys and girls benefit from these contacts.
66. At present, sixth form links with other schools are limited. However, headteachers and heads of sixth form are meeting regularly and discuss the potential for more extensive curriculum links. At present these are mainly confined to modern languages, with a small number of students taking advantage of the availability of a video link. Very few students change school because of the availability of alternative courses. However, the

potential of a consortium arrangement from September 2005 is under discussion. A number of students benefit from the school's involvement in the Comenius Project, an international scheme concerned with the skills associated with teaching and learning. A small number of students in the sixth form are involved in outreach work in local primary schools.

67. Partnership with the wider community is good. The school is very supportive of charities at local, national and international level, through the fund-raising activities of pupils, teachers and parents. Support is provided for instance for students in India and Africa, and for charities in Afghanistan. There are also well-established links with older people in the local community, of mutual benefit to adults and pupils. The school has made good progress towards the community elements of its specialist language college development plan. The shared and reciprocal activities have enhanced learning for students and some members of the local community. Provision for the community is good. The school offers a weekly programme of four languages. The work in Arabic is innovative; Chinese is to be added later in the year. The daytime courses are well supported and are programmed to meet individual adult needs through differentiated work. The University of the Third Age, a local university and a local college all use the school's facilities, its comprehensive language software, and its staff expertise. Overseas links are good, and help give the school an international feel. Links with the local business community have been harder to develop and more work is needed here. Employers have not shown much interest in conventional language courses, and only occasionally seek the help of the school. The plans for applied language courses are intended to strengthen this area. It is encouraging to note the business sponsorship of the highly successful primary language day.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

*The overall quality of leadership and management is very good. Governance, leadership and management are all very good. Arrangements for collective worship do not meet requirements.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The governors bring an impressively wide range of skills to their planning and evaluating the work of the school.
- The leadership of the school is impressive because of its strengths in depth, from the headteacher to middle managers, and its breadth across subjects and other areas of the school.
- The school is properly self-critical, and uses rigorous systems to test its effectiveness.
- Although having a below average income, the school's outcomes are impressive.
- Accommodation, although improved, still limits what may be done in some subjects.

### **Commentary**

#### ***Main school***

68. The school is fortunate to enjoy the support and guidance of governors drawn from such a wide range of backgrounds. The governors' committees are well organised and deal with much of the routine business required. Governors play a very good part in

steering the school's development, and also have a keen view of its strengths and weaknesses.

69. The action plan following the previous inspection has been satisfactory in tackling almost all points raised, although the provision for religious education in the sixth form needs extending further to have sufficient impact on the students. In almost all respects, governors discharge their responsibilities well. However, the statutory requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students is not met because of the major limitations of the school's accommodation. Within these limits, governors wish to ensure that pupils and students receive good quality provision.
70. Most pupils and parents regard the school as being well led, with sixth formers seeing this as a particular strength. The overall quality of leadership in the school is very good; the headteacher has a clear vision for the school, and this is shared by senior and middle managers. The school's direction is clear, but implementing the vision is hampered by limitations in the school's accommodation, and linked to this, a dated curriculum framework. The school's ethos is good, and the school's good inclusive nature contributes to the very good achievement overall; lower attainers do particularly well compared to those in similar schools.
71. The headteacher provides very good leadership, and she is very well supported by the senior management team. The business of leadership is taken seriously in the school, and leaders at senior and curriculum level have adequate time to carry out their responsibilities, which they do conscientiously. Despite some recruitment difficulties, leaders in the school have adhered to very high standards in making appointments, ensuring that candidates have very good teaching skills, as well as an understanding of the school's vision, so that they can play a full part in helping to achieve it. The school's strategic plan is a clear statement of the vision for the school, and the areas identified for development reflect those identified in this report.
72. The leadership has ensured that improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The school's self-evaluation report shows that the drive for further improvement has not lessened in its desire to provide the best possible education for all girls in the school, and this desire is safeguarded by strong leadership on matters relating to the achievement of individual pupils and students. The school's own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses mirrors that of the inspection team, and where there are relative weaknesses, as in the curriculum, they are already identified in the current year's school improvement plan.
73. Curriculum leadership is very good in most subjects. Departmental teams work well together, with a high degree of dedication, and the year group teams are equally committed and show similar, very effective ways of working. The quality of the leadership of the specialist language college status is excellent, offering very clear strategic direction, as well as enthusiasm and drive to ensure that targets are met, and that there is effective involvement of a wide range of people both in and outside the school.
74. As a language college, the school sees the international dimension in the school curriculum as important. Departments are encouraged to include an international focus in their curriculum, and many have developed this. The school also considers it valuable, as part of their professional development, that teachers, other than languages specialists, accompany study visits abroad; in this way they bring a range of new insights and experiences to the school curriculum.

75. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very well led and managed. The co-ordinator is very experienced, and is dedicated to ensuring that individual learning needs are identified and met well. She provides an exceptionally clear direction for provision. Very efficient procedures ensure that pupils' learning is well supported through detailed planning and close liaison with parents, subject departments, year heads and external agencies. The special educational needs teachers and the learning support assistants are deployed and supported effectively. Very good leadership and management have resulted in very good provision for these pupils being sustained since the last inspection.
76. The management of the school is very good. There are robust systems to monitor, frequently and regularly, the work of departments and other teams, and the findings are used to strengthen the school's procedures. The collection and, in particular, the use of data in this process are impressive; at every turn, the school asks how it can improve the value that it adds to the experience of the pupils as individuals. In this, it ensures that it meets the needs of individuals as far as possible. Data are analysed by ethnicity and in terms of prior attainment; there are no significant patterns of variation. The school has very good arrangements for performance management, and for staff induction. The commitment to staff training is excellent; this is a learning community. The school is well aware of its responsibilities to those with physical disabilities, but the nature of the site means that it cannot do much to improve access without substantial financial support and redevelopment.

### **Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004**

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,260,092	Balance from previous year	64,904
Total expenditure	4,199,315	Balance carried forward to the next	125,681
Expenditure per pupil	3,299		

77. The school receives a below average income per pupil and this limits how it deploys its funds. Overall, spending priorities are well matched to educational priorities, and monitoring of them is effective. Spending on teachers is slightly above average, and spending on learning resources is broadly average; this has allowed those with management responsibility the opportunity to monitor and evaluate the work of their teams to a greater degree than is usually seen.
78. The school's major constraint, its accommodation, cannot be improved from budget allocation alone. Since the previous inspection, there have been improvements to the premises, but further pinch points remain, and these limit the learning that may be undertaken. Overall, given the value that the school adds, in relation to its income, it provides very good value for money.

### **Sixth form**

79. Leadership of the sixth form is very good. The head of sixth form, together with the two heads of year, make up an effective team that has developed good communication with the sixth form team and the senior managers. The sixth form was restructured two years ago, and the leadership team provides good role models for students in their commitment to their work. Governors play a proper and active part in the sixth form's development. The head of sixth form is a member of the senior team, and ensures a good flow of information on sixth form matters, so that there are properly understood and acted upon. Curriculum leadership in the sixth form is very good. The well above average standards, and very good achievement and retention rates indicate the success of the provision. Planning for the development of the sixth form is based upon careful evaluation of evidence, and data are used well to diagnose potential problems.

## **WORK RELATED LEARNING**

Provision for work related learning is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The Year 11 work experience programme provides opportunities to help pupils develop their understanding of the world of work.
- Vocational experiences are underdeveloped in the curriculum.

### **Commentary**

80. Overall the school is meeting all statutory requirements. A recent audit has established the position of WRL and highlights the strength of the work experience programme. Pupils value their placements and can talk confidently about how they enhance their knowledge of the world of work and help with their general learning. Preparation and

debriefing for work experience is good, while employers, using a well structured evaluation sheet, are very positive about the qualities of the pupils, commenting favourably on their attitude, energy, initiative, independence and collaboration; all very important work place skills. Some subjects such as design technology, science and geography have used employers to visit the school and describe their occupations and the needs of the labour market.

81. Currently there are few specific vocational courses on offer in the main school although in the few, such as child development and business, standards are above average and pupils are positive about their learning experiences. More pupils would find such approaches to learning stimulating and subjects should consider how to give a greater weight to the needs of the world of work. The valuable emphasis provided in subjects such as design technology and English needs to be more widely delivered. No pupils as yet are benefiting from the recent initiatives on increased flexibility in the curriculum while ideas for change in line with new 14-19 curriculum thinking are only in their early planning stages. Careers guidance is satisfactory, and an important element in the tutorial programme. As a result, pupils understand the needs of employers, the changing world of industry and commerce, and how to prepare accordingly through practice letters of application, talks, and mock interviews. Work skills are well enhanced by the school's excellent enrichment programme, which gives many opportunities for leadership, responsibility, and teamwork through, for example, sport, drama, music, charity, and house events.
82. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school recognises that it is at an early stage in some aspects of WRL and is planning to pilot some developments in this area, while wishing to maintain the success that its enrichment and work experience programmes generate. Development plans recognise the value of WRL but not all subjects are translating the policy into practice. Curriculum areas have received advice and some training on integrating WRL into subject material and teaching method but more explicit links need to be drawn and more consistency ensured across the curriculum.



## **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 **excellent**.

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

- GCSE results are well above average and the pupils' achievement is excellent by the end of Year 11.
- The leadership of the subject, and the team work of the teachers, are excellent.
- Excellent assessment procedures play a major role in supporting pupils' improvement.
- Teaching is very good with some excellent features. Lessons are very lively and engaging. There are only minor points for improvement.

##### **Commentary**

83. Standards at entry in Year 7 are well above average. Since the previous inspection, test and examination results have remained well above average, with pupils consolidating and deepening the skills required to do well. Despite some fluctuations, the trend has been one of steady improvement at all levels. In 2003, the latest year for which validated data are available, results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were well above average. Provisional data for 2004 suggest a considerable improvement on previous years' figures, particularly in relation to similar schools. In the 2003 GCSE English and English literature examinations by the end of Year 11 the proportions gaining grades A\* to C were well above average. The pupils did very much better than expected given their earlier standards. The results represented excellent achievement for the pupils concerned. Higher attainers did particularly well; the proportion at grades A\* and A was more than twice the national figure. Provisional results for 2004 suggest that similar high achievement has been seen, sufficient to place the results in the top five per cent of similar schools nationally, and matching the results of 2003.
84. Standards of work seen are well above average in Years 9 and 11. Achievement is very good in Years 7 to 10, and excellent by the end of Year 11. Throughout the school, pupils make very good progress, deepening their understanding and working with rising levels of independence. In Year 9, only a very small proportion is not at the expected Level 5, mainly because their reading and writing include too many inaccuracies. More than six out of ten are at standards associated with the higher levels of six and seven. Similar standards are evident in Year 11. In keeping with recent years, almost all pupils are working at standards in the A\* to C grade range, with many more than usual at the top of that range. This is far higher than would be expected by these pupils' already well above average results at the end of Year 9. In both Years 9 and 11 many write with relish and enjoyment, using powerful vocabulary and phrasing to engage the reader. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils. Precisely targeted support enables these pupils to catch up effectively, and to achieve very well when they rejoin mainstream classes. Standards of ICT are above average, and of numeracy, well above average.
85. Standards of teaching and learning are very good at all levels; there are some excellent features. The teachers have a very secure command of their subject and very high

expectations. In lessons, pupils are consistently expected to do their best on challenging material. High achievement by the end of Year 11 results from teaching that lays the foundations for GCSE success during Years 7 to 9. Excellent lesson planning focuses sharply on learning objectives. Consequently, the ensuing learning tasks improve pupils' higher order skills of analysis and evaluation, the keys to high examination success. Pupils enjoy the wide range of learning activities. They work hard and enthusiastically. Excellent assessment procedures accelerate progress in learning: targets are challenging; tracking of progress is highly effective; and swift intervention is assured when pupils fall short of their targets. Learning activities are geared to reaching assessment aims. Pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve because marking is consistently informative. Pupils also frequently assess their own strengths and weaknesses, often using examination criteria. Learning is consolidated very well by well-structured and challenging homework throughout the school. There are few weaknesses in teaching. Occasionally, some pupils did not do as much as they could because of shortcomings in the timing of activities. Some learning was not as effective because there was not enough emphasis of the links between learning activities and learning objectives.

86. The leadership of the subject is excellent. The head of department effectively conveys her clear vision for a department of the highest quality to her team. All teachers respond positively to her high expectations, and make significant contributions to the work of the department. Approaches to learning are exciting and innovative. The head of department's own excellent teaching provides a first class role model. Management is very good. The outcomes of the department are closely evaluated by systematic monitoring, evaluation, and the development of teaching and learning. Careful evaluation of examination results has led to redesigned schemes of work such as guided reading schemes in Year 9. These are helping more pupils move on to higher than expected performance. The consistently very good teaching, the excellent achievement by the end of Year 11, and excellent leadership make the overall provision excellent. The consistently sustained high level GCSE performance, and innovative development, since the previous inspection constitute very good progress.

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

87. Pupils enter the school with well above average standards in literacy. They sustain these as they move through the school. Students apply subject vocabulary appropriately when talking and writing. Oral contributions in lessons are extensive, coherent and clear. Written work is fluent and accurate. The writing of the highest attaining pupils is of a very high standard indeed. Reading skills are fluent. In addition, most pupils consistently apply higher order reading skills. They skim and scan printed material effectively to find relevant information. They make secure deductions based on intelligent observation of clues in texts. Their understanding of the structure of language is specifically enhanced in English and modern foreign languages, reflecting the school's status as a specialist language college.
88. The school makes very good provision for the development of literacy. Its promotion has a major profile in the life and work of the school. Training events have helped to secure this. In addition, literacy is a key focus when work is sampled and lessons observed. The spotlight on literacy continues effectively under the guidance of the Enrichment of Learning group. Whole school development is very well directed by a deputy headteacher. Subjects encourage very effectively the development of key vocabulary. There is effective emphasis on the skills of structured essay writing.

### **Modern foreign languages**

Provision in modern foreign languages is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The teachers are very well qualified, set themselves high teaching standards, and require high standards of their pupils. Consequently, the pupils' achievement is high.
- Teaching is nearly always stimulating and challenging, making very effective use of a wide range of teaching methods and resources, so the pupils are motivated and learn very well.
- Assessment systems and the use of data are very well developed to track the pupils' progress; this could be improved by including pupils in the process.
- Curriculum leadership is very good, so the faculty is a successful one.

## Commentary

89. Since the previous inspection, GCSE results have shown a rising trend overall. The provisional data for 2004 suggest that GCSE results are well above average in French, German and Spanish. In 2003, the latest year for which validated national data are available, the French and Spanish results were well above the national average; in German, the results were average. The pupils tended to do as well in German and Spanish in 2003 as they did in their other subjects; they tended to do less well in French, because of staffing problems in 2003.
90. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average in Year 9, which represents very good achievement given that all pupils follow a course in two languages. In French, the teachers build well on the Year 6 start and by the end of Year 9 the highest attaining pupils reach well above average standards. By Year 9, the pupils listen, speak and read the foreign language with increasing confidence and accuracy. They continue to progress well in Years 10 and 11, and their standards remain above average in Year 11, with the prospect of improvement to the similar examination standards of previous years, given the quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection. This again shows very good achievement, given that not only are they reaching above average standards, but are also acquiring a depth of understanding of linguistic structure, and a high degree of maturity and confidence in listening, speaking, reading and writing the languages they are studying. In particular, they are increasingly able to write fluently and confidently, often using complex sentences. Throughout the main school, pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the other pupils because they are very well supported and challenged.
91. Throughout the main school, teaching and learning are very good in French, German and Spanish. Much of the teaching in all three languages is stimulating, and some is of excellent quality. The teachers are very competent linguists, using the foreign language consistently well in all lessons. As a result, the pupils develop high levels of confidence and competence in understanding and speaking. The pupils are encouraged to use the foreign language for all purposes in lessons, and an excellent example was seen in a Year 9 lesson of very effective teaching, which developed the pupils' ability to discuss grammar in German. Nearly all lessons are characterised by high levels of challenge and high expectations; the pupils therefore work hard and learn very well. Lesson planning is meticulous, showing that the teachers have a very good grasp both of a wide range of language teaching techniques and of the learning needs of the pupils. In particular, very effective use is made of the faculty's excellent resources, as well as of card games, and other resources, which the teachers make themselves. The pupils have regular opportunities to improve their ICT skills, and aspects of literacy and numeracy are developed well in many of the linguistic activities the pupils undertake. The pupils' attitudes to learning languages are very positive, and almost without exception they work with enthusiasm and commitment in lessons, which

is a strong contributory factor in the very good progress they make. Very good assessment systems are in place, and a variety of data are used very well to monitor progress and take action to improve standards where necessary. This now needs to be extended so that the pupils too have a clear understanding of how they are progressing and what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.

92. Curriculum leadership is very good, offering very clear strategic direction both for modern foreign languages and for the specialist language college. This is a significant factor in the high quality of teaching and learning, largely because the head of faculty monitors teaching, learning and standards rigorously, interprets the data very well, and uses them very effectively to inform teaching strategies and performance management. This works successfully because leadership is collaborative, involving all members of the faculty, with effective delegation to the heads of department of French, German and Spanish, who lead very well by example, especially through the quality of their teaching and their planning.
93. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Over the last five years, the faculty has maintained standards and the quality of its teaching and learning, while taking on the challenge of specialist language college status. There has been a significant extension of curricular provision, the development of effective curricular links with local schools and with further and higher education institutions, and the successful introduction of a very wide range of study visits, exchanges and work experience abroad. These all complement the teaching and enhance the pupils' linguistic, cultural and social development.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve very well because of very good teaching based on rigorous expectations.
- Pupils show very good attitudes and work solidly in lessons, even when they are not directly supervised.
- Assessment is not yet used sharply enough to ensure that all pupils have tasks consistently and accurately matched to their needs.
- Pupils do not always have enough opportunities to work independently in lessons.

### **Commentary**

94. The results of National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in 2003, the latest year for which validated national data are available, were well above average when compared to all schools, and above average compared to similar schools. Provisional results from 2004 indicate a similar outcome. Standards are so high because large numbers of pupils gain the higher levels. Since the previous inspection, standards have been consistently well above average throughout the school, with test results rising in line with the national picture. Indeed, pupils in Year 9 have, on average, been a year ahead of their peers in other schools nationally. The GCSE results in 2003 were well above average; the provisional results from 2004 indicate that this has been maintained. However, pupils' performance in mathematics tends to be below that in other subjects in the school. Although very few pupils gain grades below grade D, the department has

identified that some pupils with the potential to gain grade C are not doing so and this is an item in the department's action plan for improvement.

95. Inspection findings echo those above. Standards are well above average in Years 9 and 11, from a starting point that is itself well above average in Year 7. Achievement is very good at all levels. By Year 9, the most capable pupils are already working with, and applying facts about, angles in parallel lines and circles, applying Pythagoras' theorem and solving equations by trial and improvement. Their weaker peers focus more strongly on number, and have learned a variety of mental and written methods of calculation. Even so, much of their work is within the expected range for their age. The most capable pupils in Year 11 are already working confidently at Grade A standard. They can, for example, solve simultaneous equations graphically when one or both of the equations is a cubic. Their weaker peers know about angles in triangles and can find common factors and the highest common factor of a set of numbers.
96. Teaching and learning are very good at all levels. Pupils complete large quantities of work because of teachers' high, rigorous expectations of what they will do. The most capable pupils in particular make great strides in their learning as a result of this rigour. The weaker pupils, and those with special educational needs, receive support that enables them to make similarly rapid progress. However, few lessons include many opportunities for pupils to participate actively. Almost all pupils work with a will when they have a task to complete. However, some lessons required pupils to listen to teachers for too long, and had tasks that were not varied enough. This caused some pupils to become restless and inattentive. The department is working on making better use of assessment data to set short term targets for pupils, and to ensure that planning is sharper. In the best lessons seen, imaginative methods fired pupils with enthusiasm – this happened in a lesson for pupils in Year 8 that ingeniously used magic squares as a starting point to consolidate pupils' understanding of algebra.
97. The head of department provides good curricular leadership. There have been some barriers to improvement in recent times. For example, one senior member of the department is absent through illness and some of her timetable has been covered by the head of department, reducing the time she has for reflection and curricular innovation. As a result, the new schemes of work in use cover the required areas, but do not give guidance as to how topics can be taught. This is a factor in the narrow range of teaching techniques observed, as is the limited time available to complete formal monitoring and to share good practice. All departmental members, however, have been observed teaching in the last year. A further barrier to improvement is the accommodation. Some rooms are small and individual teachers do not have class bases. As a result, they have to move between lessons carrying any equipment needed, which delays the start of some lessons. The time restriction in setting up rooms for more practical work is another factor in the narrow range of teaching techniques observed. Since the previous inspection, very good standards have been maintained and achievement and teaching have improved. This indicates good improvement since the previous inspection.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

98. Although the school's policy for numeracy requires updating pending a new audit of how different subjects use and apply it, overall standards are well above average. Pupils in many subjects are confident users of the skills they learn in mathematics. For example, pupils regularly use and transpose formulae in science. They make increasing use of calculators, measures and graphs. There is extensive use in design

and technology, involving measurement in food technology, handling data from, for example, tally charts, using spreadsheets, and scaling templates. In geography, coursework includes high quality graph work. Numeracy is evident in lessons in most subjects, and reinforced effectively.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils do much better at examination than would be expected from their earlier standards.
- Very good leadership and management lead to very effective teamwork.
- The standard of teaching is very good, resulting in very good achievement by pupils.
- The quality of accommodation has improved, but there are still shortcomings.
- The high number of shared classes in Years 7 and 8 reduces the impact of teaching.

### Commentary

99. Results in the national tests in Year 9 in 2003 were well above average, and above those of pupils in similar schools. These results represented very good achievement during Years 7 to 9. This is the latest year for which validated data are available. Provisional data for 2004 suggest that standards remain well above average. Nevertheless, overall results in 2004 were short of the department's target. In the GCSE examinations in Year 11 in 2003, standards were well above average. Four-fifths of pupils gained one of the higher grades A\* to C, and a third gained grades A\* or A. Compared with standards in Year 9, results were well above those of similar schools, representing very good achievement for the pupils concerned. The pupils' performance in science was generally in line with that in other subjects. Results in 2004, although not yet validated, indicate that GCSE standards remain well above average, and well above those in similar schools.
100. Standards on entry to Year 7 are well above average. In work seen during the inspection, overall standards were well above average for Year 9 and Year 11, continuing the pattern of recent test and examination results. This is the result of very good teaching, and also pupils' very positive attitude to learning. Achievement at all levels is very good. Pupils build on their strong position at entry to consolidate their learning and deepen their understanding. Students with special educational needs are well supported in class, and their achievements also are very good. The department makes a very good contribution to the development of pupils' numeracy skills with regular use of formulae and graphs. Pupils' high levels of literacy skills are used effectively in writing notes, but there is an over-reliance on textbooks. Although there has been an increase in problem solving, the time devoted in class to writing too often results in insufficient time for practical work. There is increasing emphasis on the use of computers to extend learning opportunities, but a lack of hardware means that there is inconsistent practice across the department.
101. The quality of teaching is very good across the school. Pupils therefore learn well. Teachers possess a very good command of their subject, and add interest to lessons by relating their teaching of science to the world outside school. In the best lessons, planning includes devising innovative methods to increase pupils' understanding, so that pupils can learn by observation and discussion. Pupils' application and productivity

are very good, and excellent in Years 7 to 9. Apart from a very small minority of pupils, levels of concentration are extremely high, and pupils work well to the end of lessons. There are regular assessments of pupils' work. The high numbers of shared classes in Years 7 and 8 makes it more difficult for teachers to form good relationships with pupils, and to plan progression in their work.

102. The curriculum leadership and management of the faculty are very good. Planning and organisation are detailed and effective. Although the monitoring of data is very thorough, there is insufficient monitoring of classroom practice to ensure more consistency in the application of faculty policies. There is very good teamwork between teachers, and very good support from the science technicians, enabling teachers to concentrate on strategies to improve learning.
103. Since the previous inspection, there has been good progress in the quality of science teaching, and there is a good overall take-up of science subjects in the sixth form. Results in science examinations throughout the school are now consistently well above average. Since the previous inspection, they have improved significantly in Years 7 to 9, which augurs well for the future. There have been significant improvements in the quality of some laboratories, but there is still an overall shortage of specialist accommodation, and three laboratories still require refurbishment.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision for ICT is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are very good: pupils make very good progress in lessons.
- Teachers involve pupils fully in assessing and improving their achievements in all years.
- The curriculum does not always ensure that pupils have consistent opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills fully.

### **Commentary**

104. Standards in the 2004 teachers' own assessments at the end of Year 9 were below average, and well below average when compared with similar schools. Standards in the 2003 GNVQ examination at the end of Year 11 were above average. In 2004, compared with the provisional results for the GCSE applied ICT examination, standards were well above average nationally but below average when compared with similar schools. This year, the school will enter Year 11 pupils for the regular GCSE ICT examination. Because of the three different examinations it is not possible to make a judgement on trends.
105. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is good. Pupils come into the school having average knowledge and skills in ICT and make good progress overall. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in Year 9. Achievement has been limited in the past by fewer opportunities than usual for specialised teaching. This is now being remedied with specialist ICT lessons and pupils are extending their skills in word-processing and data handling. Pupils are also becoming adept at locating information and judging the validity and reliability of the source. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is good. Current standards in Year 11 are above average overall, and well above

average in the GCSE examination groups. Current Year 10 and 11 pupils have learned ICT mostly during other subject lessons during their time at school but are now making rapid strides, both in the GCSE classes and in Year 10, due to the specialist ICT lessons.

106. Teaching and learning are very good in all years. The school has set itself demanding targets for improving standards at all levels, and is well on the way to achieving these. The teaching is consistently well planned to a common framework and all teachers set very challenging tasks and a fast pace. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and interest; lessons are lively and entertaining. The school has some new equipment, such as the interactive whiteboards, which have a dramatic effect on the accessibility of both school and Internet-based resources. These were used fully in nearly all lessons seen. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that all pupils do their best; they include extra support for pupils with special educational needs and extended activities for faster learners. Teachers make particular use of the pupils' high level of literacy and numeracy, with 'grown-up' texts and high expectations of mental arithmetic. Occasionally, lessons are less successful when the teacher does not make allowances for lower attaining pupils. In others, pupils can be passive, when the teacher expounds ideas for extended periods, with limited contributions from the youngsters.
107. Assessment forms an integral part of all tasks. The teacher explains both the nature of the activity and the different National Curriculum levels that the pupils can expect to reach. For their part, pupils set themselves a target and then judge how well they are doing against a list of criteria. This gives them very good responsibility for their own learning. In addition, teachers support pupils well with their homework, and are usually available at lunchtimes for consultation.
108. The leadership of the department is good, despite problems with illness. The teachers work very well as a team and the acting head of department is highly committed and sets a very good example. Curriculum innovation is satisfactory and recent improvements to the curriculum such as more specialist teaching and better resources are now bringing the department into line with current standards. However, timetable constraints are limiting the scope for developing the courses that the school wants to offer, and this means that the very good teaching does not have as great an impact on achievement as it should.
109. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have improved in Years 7 to 9; the programmes of study are now good, and assessment is very good. The cross-curricular provision has remained much the same.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

110. The pupils' competence in ICT is above average in Years 9 and Year 11. They do not reach the same standards as they do in other subjects because, until recently they have not had sufficient specialist teaching. Pupils develop the skills and knowledge they need to enhance their learning in other subjects through word-processing, designing leaflets or creating graphs. The level of teacher expertise across the school is good, and a high proportion of pupils has computers at home. Most pupils, for example, use e-mail so that they can work on files at home. The pupils enjoy very good opportunities in modern foreign languages to use ICT to enhance their learning, with video, e-mail and exciting on-line resources in the target languages. Other departments, such as science and music, are less well equipped. In some subjects, such as physical education, the ICT work seen was mostly done outside lessons.



## HUMANITIES

### History

Provision for history is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is good, but some shortcomings in written work restrict achievement at the highest GCSE levels.
- Pupils' progress is assessed regularly but the use of data to track progress varies between teachers.
- Very good leadership results in a strong department deeply committed to improvement but the monitoring of teaching and learning could be better.

#### Commentary

111. The trend in GCSE results has been one of well above average standards since the previous inspection. They were well above average in 2003, the last year for which validated data are available. Provisional data for 2004 indicate that this pattern is continuing, though fewer pupils gained the highest grades of A\* and A in 2004.
112. Current standards of work are well above average in Years 9 and 11. Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 in comparison with their average standards in history on entry. Progress in Year 7 is especially impressive. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is good, with pupils deepening and broadening their knowledge. However, their essay writing limits achievement. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented, achieve equally well in all years. Pupils have very good historical knowledge and understanding, and good historical skills. They work well in lessons with higher attaining pupils reaching high intellectual levels. Pupils respond well to challenge. Year 7 pupils for instance, worked at mature levels in their analysis of evidence to decide whether John was a good or a bad king. Writing is fluent, analytical and clearly focused, but GCSE essays are not sufficiently well structured to reach the standards expected at the highest grades. Explanations are not always fully developed and supported by evidence. Conclusions are sometimes weak. Historical sources are analysed in detail but not always sufficiently critically. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are very good, but the quality of written work is sometimes lowered by carelessness.
113. Teaching and learning are good overall. In Years 7 to 9 they are very good. In all years, lessons are clearly focused with a strong emphasis on enquiry and analysis. The teachers' very good subject knowledge and explanations enable pupils to understand complex issues and to develop good thinking skills. Year 9 pupils, for example, worked at demanding levels in identifying instances of anti-Semitic persecution across the centuries. Presentations are enhanced by the good use of PowerPoint. There is a strong focus on the development of historical skills from Year 7 onwards and very good support for literacy and numeracy skills. Learning thrives as a result of very good classroom relationships. These foster good and productive group work, and strongly support pupils' personal development. Questioning is effective in checking understanding, but does not always require pupils to explain their answers fully. In a number of lessons, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn through discussion. Assessment is systematically linked to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades, data are used well to monitor progress and set targets at department level, but their use by teachers varies. Furthermore, marking varies in the extent it provides specific guidance for improvement.

114. The high standards, very good teaching in Years 7 to 9, and pupils' enthusiasm for history result from very good curriculum leadership. The head of department's strong lead inspires other history teachers to share his strong commitment to high standards of provision and attainment. Curriculum planning includes good enhancement through visits and other activities, which deepen students' enjoyment of history. Management is good. Provision is monitored regularly, but arrangements for lesson observation and checking the quality of pupils' work are not rigorous enough to ensure consistency in practice. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection in sustaining well above average standards at GCSE, and improving teaching and learning.

## **Geography**

Provision in geography is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching ensures well above average GCSE results.
- Pupils are given very good guidance on how to improve.
- Higher attaining pupils are regularly challenged to develop their thinking.
- In some lessons the range of tasks is too extensive for lower attaining pupils.

### **Commentary**

115. Since the previous inspection GCSE results at the end of Year 11 have consistently been well above average, as confirmed by the 2003 examinations and the provisional results for 2004. Pupils tend to do better in geography than in their other subjects.

116. Standards of geographical skills are broadly average when pupils start in Year 7. In work seen and in the teachers' own assessments of standards, they are well above average by Year 9, which represents very good achievement overall. The pupils have a very good understanding of geographical terms and respond enthusiastically to question and answer work offering mature ideas and making complex links. At times the lessons are so full that lower attaining pupils find it hard to keep up with the range of tasks and might therefore not consolidate their work as they should. By Year 11 standards are well above average, which represents very good achievement because it strongly builds on the good standards at the start of the course by developing high order skills and broadening and deepening learning. These high standards are very evident in the pupils' oral responses and especially from higher attainers in their extremely detailed and analytical extended writing. All pupils have a secure factual base and can draw conclusions from evidence as best demonstrated in their GCSE coursework. While the numbers involved are small, the pupils with special educational needs make very good progress as do the gifted and talented. Geography makes a very good contribution to literacy by its use of key words and its extensive opportunities for writing. In numeracy graphs and statistics are widely used. The subject encourages the use of ICT both for research and by teaching methods.

117. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the main school. At all levels, the teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and make the lessons stimulating by using a wide range of tasks. Colourful images of contrasting world environments create a desire to learn and, linked to clever questioning, give pupils a deep insight. Pupils can analyse material and link cause and effect both orally and in some very high quality writing especially in Years 10 and 11, where the high attainers flourish and show their capacity for sophisticated thinking through independent study. All lessons

are well planned, have pace and challenge and encourage pupils to work collaboratively. Very good outcomes can be linked to high teacher expectations, mutual respect and a very good pupil work ethic. Attitudes are very good as is behaviour. Fieldwork is strong and contributes to the high standards in GCSE coursework. The pupils' awareness of social, cultural and moral issues is very good, while a spiritual dimension is well developed through reflection and an appreciation of the wonder of the natural environment. The subject continually uses world events to heighten pupils' awareness and it makes a very good contribution to citizenship. Marking is consistent with many praise comments and very good advice to all pupils on how to prepare for GCSE and how to improve their work. Pupils are regularly encouraged to evaluate their own work.

118. Curriculum leadership is very good with teamwork and mutual support being strengths. Enthusiastic, energetic teachers with very good subject knowledge place a strong emphasis on learning. The subject leader has high expectations and a continuous desire to improve. Management is very good with very effective planning and organisation. The good report of the previous inspection has been built on by further raising standards, a very strong commitment to citizenship, and a willingness to innovate in teaching methods, so improvement since then has been very good.

## **Religious education**

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

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is very good and enables pupils to achieve very well.
- Recent examination results are very encouraging, with a very high percentage of pupils achieving the higher grades.
- The curriculum is innovative and challenges pupils to achieve their potential.
- Setting arrangements in Years 10 and 11 do not reflect pupils' abilities in religious education.

## **Commentary**

119. A short course GCSE for all pupils was introduced in 2002, with pupils sitting the first examination in 2004. Results were very high, with nearly 40 per cent of pupils gaining grades A\* or A.

120. By Year 9, standards seen are well above average. This represents very good achievement in all years by all groups of pupils. By Year 9, pupils have very secure knowledge and understanding of the key beliefs and practices of Christianity, and of the other faiths represented in Britain. They appreciate the ways in which such faiths affect daily life. They use specialist vocabulary with growing confidence. All pupils move beyond the externals of religion to probe deeper questions of meaning and purpose.

121. By Year 11, standards of work seen are well above average. Pupils achieve very well overall, although they show more confidence in their knowledge and understanding of key beliefs and practices than they do in their understanding of why such beliefs affect people's lives. This is because pupils in Years 10 and 11 have not had a consistent

experience of the subject because of recent staffing instabilities. These difficulties have now been resolved. Pupils in all year groups write with growing confidence and sensitivity because of the emphasis on regular assessment tasks based on religious puzzles such as why people might believe in an afterlife.

122. Teaching and learning are very good. There are many strengths in the teaching that have a very positive impact on both pupils' attitudes, and on the quality of their learning. Enthusiasm is a characteristic of all lessons, and intellectual demands are high. This means that pupils enjoy their lessons and rise to the challenges they are set. A significant strength of the teaching is the very clear emphasis on developing pupils' thinking skills. Pupils in Year 8, for example, when studying the life of Jesus, conclude their written work with a discussion on why Jesus might be important, not only to Christians, but also to Muslims, Jews and atheists. Because of the very good teaching, pupils' attitudes towards the subject are largely very positive. They show considerable pride in their work. A very small minority of pupils in Year 10, however, behaves badly and is disruptive.
123. Curriculum leadership is very good. There is a very good clarity of vision and a passionate commitment to improvement. The curriculum, for example, is innovative whilst fully meeting statutory requirements. Setting arrangements in Years 10 and 11, however, are of some concern because they depend on pupils' abilities in modern foreign languages. All issues identified in the previous inspection have been addressed very effectively. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. The head of department has, for example, introduced both a GCSE short course for all pupils and an A-level course.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- The new head of faculty is inspiring very good improvement.
- Very good ICT is helping pupils to enhance design communication.
- National Curriculum levels are not fully understood by pupils.
- Standards achieved at GCSE are well above national averages.

#### **Commentary**

124. At the GCSE examination in 2003, and from provisional figures in 2004, results have been consistently well above average. However, pupils tended to do less well in the subject than in the others that they took. This has been partly caused by pupils being entered for an inappropriate tier in their GCSE, and also a failure to monitor pupils who were finding coursework timing difficult. Both issues have been dealt with, and data for 2004 show an improvement on 2003 results.
125. On entry in Year 7, design and technology skills are below average because of limited designing skills. However, standards seen during the inspection are above average in Year 9. This represents very good achievement in Years 7 to 9. However, it also shows that assessment by teachers has been too generous; in 2003 and 2004, the

teachers' own assessments indicated standards at the end of Year 9 to be well above average. Inconsistencies in marking and assessment show missed opportunities to strengthen flow planning, and design drawings. Making skills, criticised in the previous report, are much improved, and pupils have pride in their work. Very effective use of computers is improving presentation and designing; an emphasis on literacy and numeracy is also aiding design communication. Pupils are not aware of the content of National Curriculum levels so have difficulty in understanding what their personal targets mean in terms of what they must do to improve. Standards of work are well above average in Year 11; pupils have a more mature approach to design. Their achievement is very good in relation to their standards at the start of the GCSE courses. Strengths in primary and secondary research, innovative thinking, and a very good knowledge of materials and tools, promote very good final outcomes. Portfolios, especially in food, child development, and textiles, are very good. A few pupils still have problems with time management, flow planning, and regular recording of changes to their designs.

126. Overall, teaching and learning are good; many features are very good, but assessment needs improving. Specialist teachers, some part time, capitalise on sharing good practice. High quality demonstrations set the standards expected, and wall displays motivate improvement. However, there are inconsistencies in marking, assessment, and use of whole-class sessions in Years 7 to 9. Some teachers use self assessment to good effect, which has a good impact on pupils' personal targets. Innovative lesson starters engage pupils in their learning, but their use is not always consistent. In Years 10 and 11, teachers and pupils use examination mark schemes well to track progress. The promotion of independence in learning in Years 7 to 9 gives pupils confidence in Year 10 and 11 to take more responsibility for their learning.
127. Curriculum leadership is very good. The recently appointed head of faculty has developed an enthusiastic team including very effective technicians. The subject audit has highlighted action needed. Monitoring and observation are in place and training is well targeted. Meetings are well organised and encourage staff to develop their management skills. Risk assessment is in place.
128. Improvement from the previous inspection has been very good; all issues have been tackled through the action plan. The much-improved accommodation has had a marked effect on better achievement and attitudes in the subject.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

*Art and design and music were inspected in depth. Drama was sampled.*

129. Results in the 2003 **drama** examination were high, with 95 per cent of pupils gaining grades A\* to C from an entry that was twice as large as the average national figure. More than one in five of the pupils gained grade A\*, over three times the national rate. High standards are also evident in the provisional results for 2004. In the two lessons observed, teaching was very good in Year 10 and good in Year 9. In Year 10, standards were well above average in terms of performance and innovation. Standards were above average in Year 9. Drama makes a very good contribution to the enrichment of the curriculum.

### **Art and design**

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

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results have been very high and standards are similar in current Year 11 work.
- Pupils sustain very high quality in an unusually rich range of two- and three-dimensional media.
- Teachers successfully develop very good levels of confidence amongst pupils to achieve well.
- Excellent teamwork between staff provides pupils with an exceptional range of expertise.
- Pupils enjoy work and become highly creative, with older pupils developing individual flair.
- New ICT hardware is not yet used as creatively in pupils' work as it should be.

## **Commentary**

130. In the GCSE examination results have been very high in recent years. In 2004, this pattern continued; a high percentage gained A\* or A grades, and more than 90 per cent of pupils gained at least grade C. Pupils tend to do significantly better in art than in the other subjects that they took.
131. Pupils' standards on entry are above average. They rapidly gain experience and confidence in a very rich range of media. All pupils can therefore find success, enabling them to enjoy their developing abilities to express ideas visually. Very good levels of encouragement from staff reinforce this confidence well. Progress is very good to Year 9 and standards are well above average by then. Pupils use their skills in two and three-dimensional media highly effectively, but do not yet turn to ICT naturally as part of the range of creative media available. With this exception, pupils of all abilities achieve very well in Years 7 to 9.
132. Current Year 11 work shows similar very high standards to recent GCSE examinations. Achievement is excellent to reach such high levels. The rich range and mix of media that pupils use continues to stimulate very impressive, individualistic final outcomes. Pupils' research and visual investigations in sketchbooks are of equally high quality, showing striking creativity and flair in high attaining pupils' work. Year 10's work also matches these standards. Whilst a handful of pupils' current work falls below C grade, these cases are well targeted by staff, who provide appropriate support. Most will pull standards up by Year 11, because their response to teachers' challenges is very good. Pupils gain high levels of self-fulfilment through rich visual explorations.
133. Teaching and learning are very good overall and excellent for GCSE work. Teachers work exceptionally well as a team, using their valuable range of subject expertise and competence to promote the very high standards described. Complex projects are very well structured to teach pupils how to use different media very effectively, and how to mix these creatively. Teachers use very encouraging styles of feedback. This gives young pupils confidence that they can use these techniques effectively, which leads to a "can do" approach. By early Year 10, higher attaining pupils use their very high levels of technical competence highly successfully in personally interpretative visual responses. These characteristics develop excellently well by the end of Year 11, with many pupils' work showing creative personal flair. Assessment is very good in Years 10 and 11 in particular, with constant reference to assessment objectives in tightly targeted one-to-one sessions between pupils and teachers in lessons. In other years,

recent improvements to assessment, which enable pupils to understand the levels of the National Curriculum, are not yet fully embedded.

134. Leadership of the department and of the curriculum is very good. Recent recruitment has resulted in the very good balance of skills and expertise described. The very high standards reported at the previous inspection have been maintained effectively. An enhanced range of media, including better resources for photography is now available for pupils' use. Improvement has been good. Recently acquired computers and an interactive whiteboard now provide further opportunities for staff to promote ICT properly as another creative tool in their range. Training for this is imminent and timely.

## Music

Provision for music is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching which leads to very good achievement.
- There is very good curriculum leadership in the subject.
- There is excellent extra curricular provision.
- Learning opportunities are limited by unsatisfactory accommodation, and the limited access to computers.

## Commentary

135. Standards in the GCSE examination have been well above average since the previous inspection and almost half of pupils gained A\* or A in 2003. In 2004, these standards have been improved further, with nearly two-thirds of the entry gaining an A\* or A grade. Healthy numbers of pupils opt for music, and they achieve very well during the course.

136. Standards on entry are broadly average and by Year 9 are well above average; this represents very good achievement. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils showed very good knowledge of musical vocabulary and could discuss differences between musicals and opera convincingly. They learnt to sing 'Blue Moon' very quickly adding scat sung *ostinati* as accompaniment. They performed to a high standard on keyboards with some pupils adding chords to the melody and sequencing on the computer. Standards of work seen show standards to be well above average in Year 11, representing very good achievement for the pupils in question, particularly in terms of the proportion aiming for the highest grades at GCSE. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils worked enthusiastically on keyboards or computers composing sets of variations, ternary or minimalist pieces. Pupils' literacy is well developed and reinforced in lessons whether giving extended answers to questions, in discussion about music or in their writing. However, ICT use in music is insufficient, as there is a shortage of computers within the department, and only occasional access to a computer suite is possible.

137. Overall, teaching and learning are very good in all years. Teachers are very experienced, have excellent subject knowledge and high expectations. They plan effectively and give very clear explanations. Questioning is used very well in lessons, so that pupils learn quickly, are interested in their work, and are well motivated. As a result of the strengths of the teaching, pupils work well independently and are active participants in lessons, applying effort and concentration. High achievers and pupils

with special educational needs are well catered for and supported appropriately in lessons. Assessment is good in Years 7 to 9, and very good in Years 10 to 11. More use needs to be made of National Curriculum levels in lessons to assist in target setting, and pupils need to be fully aware of how to improve their work and what they need to do to achieve the next level.

138. Curriculum leadership is very good. There is a well-established team of teachers who work very well together. Planning and documentation support the high standards achieved. A strength of the department is the extra curricular activities that are excellent. Very good use is made of sixth formers to lead certain activities that complement a busy schedule of activities that is broad and well supported by pupils. The choirs and ensembles have received national recognition several times in the Music for Youth National Festival and very high standards of singing and playing were seen during the inspection notably in rehearsals of the Finale from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony by the girls' choir and senior orchestra.
139. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection with high standards maintained, the excellent extra curricular provision and more use of ICT. Accommodation is unsatisfactory as the second classroom is too small for large classes, and a computer room has to be used as a third classroom. This has a constraining effect on the curriculum, which limits the use of resources for different classes, particularly the use of computers. The department continues to make a very good contribution to the social, moral, spiritual and cultural life of the school.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The department has good leadership, management and direction.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Not enough time is allocated for the core physical education programme in Years 10 and 11, and this constrains pupils' achievement.
- Too many physical education classes are scheduled at one time and, when linked with limited facilities and unfit playing fields, this also constrains achievement.
- The very good extra curricular programme provides opportunities for all pupils, especially the talented pupils, to extend their learning.

### **Commentary**

140. Patterns at GCSE in recent years have shown above average results, with similar numbers of pupils taking the examination each year. In 2003, the latest year for which validated national data are available, results are also above average. The 2004 provisional examination data suggest that results are higher than in the recent past.
141. Pupils arrive at school with broadly average standards in physical education. By Year 9, observation of work shows that standards are above average; all pupils show good achievement over the first three years. They successfully learn many of the basic skills required for taking part in games, dance and gymnastics. By Year 9, pupils show a good understanding of the purposes of warm up and demonstrate good passing and receiving skills in different games with a minority showing good spatial awareness.



Standards in Years 10 and 11 in the core physical education programme are above average. However, achievement is only satisfactory. This is a consequence of insufficient time for the core physical education programme and timetabling too many classes for the facilities available. When linked with inclement weather, theory sessions in classrooms replace the normal programme, depressing standards and achievement. In contrast, those pupils who follow the GCSE option attain standards that are well above average and achieve well. These pupils are well motivated and they are building successfully on their core physical education programme. This was well endorsed by scrutiny of pupils' work. In the core programme, pupils start to apply very successfully their skills within different games and activities. In lessons seen, pupils demonstrated both competence and confidence in netball and basketball. For instance, Year 10 pupils in netball and basketball used their rapid passing skills to move a ball from defence to attack, making good use of both width and depth.

142. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good in all years. This is a consequence of knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers who motivate pupils, creating a good learning environment. This is evident in the high levels of participation in lessons, extra curricular activities, standards of dress, and the pupils' good attitudes and behaviour. Lesson planning is effective and learning objectives are usually shared with pupils. Good teaching successfully combines high expectations, pace and challenge, which ensure that pupils are actively involved. However, in a small minority of lessons seen, there was insufficient challenge and pace, as seen in dance and rhythmic gymnastics lessons. The best learning occurs when there is a constant demand on pupils to do better, with the teacher making a consistent emphasis on quality and improvement as exemplified in a Year 10 netball lesson. Overall, teaching is underpinned by good relationships and good attitudes, which enhance learning. Limited access to computers in GCSE theory lessons constrains aspects of investigation. However, pupils make good use of home computers. Literacy and numeracy standards successfully support written work. Teachers successfully adapt teaching methods to suit pupils with special educational needs; this ensures they achieve as their peers. Assessment is now good and is beginning to be used well in planning work.

143. Good curriculum leadership is providing clear vision and direction for the subject. The recently appointed head of department has lost no time in undertaking a review of the department and has put in place improvements aimed at raising standards like monitoring and assessment procedures. Existing strengths, such as the successful extra curricular programme, have been maintained. Accommodation and facilities for physical education are satisfactory. Parts of the hard play areas are unsafe and are not used, the field does not drain well, and too many classes are timetabled at one time. This constrains the development of excellence in physical education. Since the previous inspection, initially, improvement in physical education was slow. However, the appointment of the new head of department has ensured improvement has been satisfactory since the previous report. Teachers are working well as a team with a strong commitment to improving standards.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

### **Business studies**

*Too little teaching could be seen to reach a firm judgement on provision. However, some lessons were seen, and documentation and samples of the pupils' work were examined.*

144. Standards in the GCSE examinations in recent years, and in work seen, are well above average, and pupils show very good achievement in relation to the average standards when they join the course. Particular strengths lie in the ability of pupils to apply and analyse the work that they do, and to match examination criteria when writing answers. In the two Year 10 lessons seen, teaching was very good overall, in spite of the presence of a small number of very difficult pupils in one session; teachers show good class control in the lessons, enabling those who want to work to do so. The teachers' subject expertise and their work on assessment are strengths of the department. Marking is thorough and gives pupils clear feedback on how to improve. More importantly, pupils take an active part in assessing the quality of their work against examiners' criteria. The curriculum leadership of the department is very good, and the points raised at the previous inspection have been tackled well. However, there are anomalies in time allocated to different groups in Years 10 and 11 that make it difficult to make the best use of teachers' time. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

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

*It was not possible to observe teaching at any level because no lessons were timetabled during the inspection, but documents and samples of pupils' work in citizenship were examined.*

145. On the evidence of discussions with pupils and work seen, standards are average and achievement is satisfactory by Years 9 and 11. For example, pupils have a sound understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and the need to respect the values and traditions of cultures other than their own.

146. The school has a satisfactory programme of study. It is carefully planned to ensure that all pupils in Years 7 to 11 experience a suitable range of opportunities. These include: taking responsibility within and outside school; learning how democracy operates; exploring conflict and war; environmental issues and human rights. For example, pupils learn how their views can be aired, by electing representatives, and raising issues with the school council. Form captains regularly update a citizenship file that tracks what has been covered by the form and, occasionally, by named pupils. Pupils also record local, national and international events that affect them, or that are discussed in class, in their 'planners' on a weekly basis. However, this process is very patchy as not all pupils or teachers remember to do this, so limiting its value. Whilst pupils are tested on a range of issues at the end of Year 9, the school does not regularly assess pupils' progress or set individual targets which could help them improve their achievement.

147. Leadership of the subject is satisfactory. However, pressure on the timetable has limited the scope for monitoring and developing citizenship.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

The tables below show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003, the last year for which validated data are available.

### Level 3 GCE AS level courses (Only courses with six or more entries are recorded)

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	6	25.0	23.7	75.0	80.1	30.0	29.9
Chemistry	6	50.0	13.9	100	72.7	31.7	20.6
English	7	71.4	17.5	85.7	82.9	42.9	28.7
Design and technology	6	0	15.1	66.7	74.9	16.7	25.3
Geography	12	25.0	19.8	100	74.3	32.5	26.5
German	6	33.3	19.3	100	81.5	38.3	28.9
Mathematics	15	13.3	17.1	100	61.9	34.7	22.1
Psychology	13	15.4	16.7	84.6	69.7	27.7	24.1

### Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses (Only courses with six or more entries are recorded)

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	16	68.8	50.2	100	98.6	98.8	87.5
Biology	38	57.9	39.2	100	96.4	93.2	78.6
Chemistry	23	69.6	49.0	100	97.6	100	84.9
Economics	14	92.9	52.0	100	98.9	108.6	88.3
English	23	56.5	36.3	100	99.4	93.9	80.9
English literature	6	50.0	46.5	100	99.5	86.7	86.5
French	6	50.0	51.5	100	98.8	90.0	87.6
Design and technology	7	42.9	35.0	100	97.8	80.0	77.9
Geography	28	50.0	44.5	100	98.7	92.1	84.0
German	8	50.0	47.9	100	98.4	80.0	84.8
History	26	53.8	44/6	100	99.0	91.5	84.6
Mathematics	15	60.0	55.6	100	96.7	97.3	88.8
Psychology	32	53.1	42.7	100	97.4	91.3	81.8
Physics	11	63.6	44.6	100	96.7	101.8	81.7
Physical education	11	36.4	30.9	100	98.0	87.3	75.2

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

*The inspection focused on English literature and French. Work was sampled in English language.*

148. **English language** is a new course, and the first year group of students to take the examination will do so in the summer of 2005. Teaching in the lesson seen was satisfactory, and the students concentrated on the work, which included a good range of resources, including video clips, poetry, and articles to discuss. Their achievement is good overall, but there is little evidence of students engaging in the kind of wide reading that will gain them the highest grades.

### English literature

Provision for English literature is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results have improved significantly during the last three years.
- Teaching is very good and is a major factor in the students' very good achievement.
- Students from a wide range of prior attainments enjoy the course and work hard.
- The provision is very well led and co-ordinated. Teamwork is very good.
- To raise standards, the students need to improve their written work to match the quality of their oral responses.

#### Commentary

149. In 2003, the latest year for which validated data are available, results in the English literature A-level examination were above average. They were an improvement on the average results of 2002. Provisional data for 2004 show further significant improvement with students doing notably better than expected to gain well above average results overall. More than two-thirds of candidates gained the highest grades of A or B. In the 2003 AS examination, students did significantly better than expected. In 2004, they did better than expected, especially middle and lower attainers. The course is popular and the rate of successful completion high.

150. Standards in Year 13 are above average. This represents very good achievement in relation to the students' below average standards at the start of the course. During the lessons observed, students of all attainments worked with enthusiasm. Most showed very good independence of thought and also worked with high levels of collaboration with their fellow students. The students' oral contributions indicated well above average standards when discussing the character and motivation of Jessica from *A Merchant of Venice* or the symbolic use of colours in *The Colour Purple*. However, these standards are less consistently apparent in written work, where standards are above average. Although higher attainers write at a well above average standard (and sometimes higher), others are not doing justice to their insight and understanding through their writing. To do so, they require a more consistently analytical register, more rigorous use and comment on quotations and other textual evidence, and a sharper focus on how the author's use of language shapes the reader's response. Nevertheless, students make very good progress in the overall organisation of their extended assignments. They talk about the course and the texts with enjoyment. Several intend to continue on English related courses in higher education. In Year 12 students have made an assured start to the course. They made very good progress on their first acquaintance with Chaucer, successfully understanding much of the text and making drawing conclusions about the character of the miller. Standards of ICT use are above average. There was no evidence of numeracy within the course.

151. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject, but of equal significance, they convey their passion for literature. This, in turn, engages and motivates the students. Students' interpretations are broadened by the teachers drawing on a range of contextual perspectives such as how a post holocaust generation may be drawn to a different attitude towards Shylock from that held by Shakespeare's contemporaries. Students are also encouraged by the teachers' excellent assessment procedures. Strengths are identified and reinforced. At the same time teachers convey very high expectations by setting out clearly how students can improve. Teachers ensure students are aware of their target grades and closely monitor their progress towards them. They make very good use of assessment objectives and criteria, which enhances the students' understanding of how to improve. The teachers' inventive use of a wide range of resources underpins an engaging and varied range of learning tasks. The wide range of attainments of those admitted to the course indicates a very good level of equality of opportunity. Although the teachers' current level of focus on the conventions of assignment writing and examination answers enables many to make good progress, middle and lower attainers require even more focus to secure higher standards. There are frequent opportunities for oral work. However, unless working in small groups, students tend not to respond directly to each other's contributions. This constrains the range and spontaneity of whole class discussions.
152. Curriculum leadership is very good and the provision very well managed. Teamwork is very good. Teachers work in pairs very effectively to produce, review and improve schemes of work. There is very good provision for enrichment. Students attend lectures and conferences related to the subjects. Teachers provide extra mural sessions on their own literary interests for students considering higher education. Students also successfully fulfil an ambassadorial role in relation to Year 11 pupils, encouraging recruitment. After a dip in results, there is now a pattern of sustained improvement, which represents good progress since the previous inspection.

## French

Provision in French is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers have excellent subject knowledge, and plan and deliver the lessons very well, using a wide range of effective resources to ensure that the students are motivated and well involved.
- This very good teaching is characterised by high expectations and high levels of challenge which ensure that the students work hard, learn very well and develop well as independent learners.

### Commentary

153. The small numbers of students who take the A-level examination in French each year are not large enough to allow statistically reliable comparisons with national standards. In 2003, all six candidates passed the A-level examination in French, with almost all of them achieving higher grades than their GCSE results would suggest. The 2004 picture is similar, with six of the eight candidates exceeding their predicted grades. In 2002 all four students gained an A or a B grade. Since the previous inspection, the department has maintained similarly high A-level standards, as well as its good level of individual student achievement. Retention rates are high in languages, and nearly all students progress from AS to completing A-level.

154. By Year 13, standards in work seen during the inspection are above average. This represents very good achievement overall, given the starting points of these students, and the much more sophisticated nature of the language needed at this level. Students make the transition from GCSE to A-level very effectively, receiving consistent challenge and good encouragement from the teachers to enable them to get to grips with the more complex demands of A-level language and topic work. The students build well on their mastery of basic grammar, and gradually acquire a more varied and interesting range of vocabulary and idiom with which to express themselves in speaking and writing. The highest attainers in the group use a good variety of sentence patterns, tenses and verb forms, well linked sentences and an appropriate and articulate use of language, conveying well-developed and thoughtful ideas. The students speak confidently, clearly and fluently, and are able to discuss points of view effectively and intelligently. Their listening and reading comprehension skills are of a high order.
155. Teaching and learning are very good overall; some teaching is excellent, resulting in highly successful learning. The teachers are very well qualified for work at this level, and provide excellent models of the language for their students, encouraging them successfully to use more complex and stylistic language not just in written work, but also in oral work, and to debate in a convincing, emphatic manner. They give the students challenging work to do, and have very high expectations of what can be achieved. The students respond to this in a mature and responsible way, developing well as independent learners. Lessons are very well planned to ensure that the students learn efficiently. Teaching is underpinned by excellent use of a wide range of resources, including multi-media presentations on the interactive white board, so that the students are motivated and helped in a whole range of different ways to learn very effectively. In lessons, the teachers encourage and engage the students well, often very enthusiastically, and relationships are positive and productive. Aspects of literacy and application of number are well fostered, and the students have good access to computers to enable them to improve their linguistic skills as well as their ICT skills. Assessment is very good, and very well used to help individual students to improve. Marking is also very good at this level: it is careful and rigorous with very good use of full, formative comment.
156. Curriculum leadership is very good. The curriculum is very well planned and very good use is made of topical material to provide an up-to-date knowledge of France and other francophone countries. Students have benefited from study visits to mainland Europe, and there are good opportunities for the students to undertake work experience in France during their course. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

## **MATHEMATICS**

*The focus of the inspection was on the A-level mathematics course. Further mathematics was sampled.*

157. Very few students do **further mathematics**, but results have been consistently well above average. One Year 12 lesson was seen. The students achieved satisfactorily as they learned new concepts about vector geometry. The teacher demonstrated high levels of subject knowledge in this lesson, which translated into high expectations of what students would be able to understand and do. Students readily responded, and

worked with high levels of diligence, ending the lesson with a secure understanding of relative position and displacement, and the associated notation.

## **Mathematics**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Rigorous teaching with high expectations leads students to achieve very well and attain high grades in external examinations.
- Good curricular leadership supports teaching and learning in the department.
- Students have few opportunities to work independently and manage their own learning.

### **Commentary**

158. Standards in the 2003 A-level examinations were well above average when compared to other schools nationally, with over 60 per cent of candidates gaining the highest grades A and B. This was further improved in 2004, when the school's results placed it in the top five per cent nationally with almost 90 per cent of candidates gaining the top grades. Retention on the course is good.
159. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards are well above average in Year 13. The rate of progress that students make, and the rigour and challenge they meet in lessons, mean that they achieve very well in relation to their standards at entry. At the time of the inspection, some students were about to take module examinations, and their lessons were entirely appropriately geared to revision and examination practice.
160. Teaching and learning are very good overall. In the revision lessons, teachers demonstrated a very secure knowledge of the content, as well as a clear understanding of the requirements of the examinations. Students were keen to check their understanding and asked relevant questions to ensure they got the most out of the lessons. Other lessons introduced new content to students. Teachers were careful to ensure that students understood what they were doing by checking their work in class and afterwards. However, some opportunities were missed to allow students to investigate and discover facts for themselves. For example, in a lesson about trigonometry, although graphical calculators were used effectively to illustrate teaching points, their use as a teaching aid to enable students to explore how the three main ratios behave for angles larger than a right angle was not fully exploited. However, in a lesson introducing a statistics module, the teacher made effective use of biased dice to challenge students' preconceptions about probability, and to introduce the concept of the modelling cycle. Marking of work is regular and thorough, and gives clear advice for improvement to students, enabling them to progress well.
161. The head of department provides good curricular leadership. Staffing difficulties have meant that she has had to shoulder a larger than usual proportion of the teaching of sixth form groups, and this has affected her ability to monitor the department's work effectively, or to update schemes of work to include guidance on methods. Nevertheless, highly skilled and experienced specialist teachers are able to use that experience to ensure that all students do as well in examinations as they possibly can, and it is this fact that is driving the very good achievement in the department.

Standards and teaching have both improved significantly since the time of the previous inspection: the department's improvement in the intervening period has been good.

## SCIENCE

*The focus subject was physics, but work was sampled in biology and chemistry.*

162. Recent examination results in **biology** have been well above average with a high proportion of A and B grades. Teaching in the lessons seen was very good, and students were very involved in their work. As a result, their achievement was very good. There is a very high take-up of the subject. Results in **chemistry** are also well above average. Teaching was very good, and challenged the students to think about their work. This increased their interest and their understanding of chemical processes. Achievement was very good.

### Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the subject are very good, resulting in very good teamwork.
- Teaching and learning are very good; there is a very good response from students.
- Overall, standards are well above average.
- There has been some improvement in the quality of accommodation, but one laboratory is in need of urgent refurbishment.

#### Commentary

163. Students starting the course in Year 12 have a wide range of prior attainment at GCSE level, and their overall standards in physics are generally above average. Their results in both AS and A-level in 2003 indicate their achievements in the sixth form to be very good. Their A-level results are consistently well above average; in 2003 they were very high compared with the national average. A high proportion of students gains A and B grades, and it is rare for any student completing the course not to gain at least a grade E. These high standards were maintained in the examination results in 2004.

164. In work seen during the inspection, it was evident that students in both Years 12 and 13 are also working at these same high standards, and achievement is very good. They make a very good contribution to the progress of lessons, and readily ask questions if they lack understanding. They have a very positive attitude to learning, and collaborate extremely well in both theory and practical work. Scrutiny of written work in folders indicated that their work is well organised; they take pride in the quality of their presentation. Students appreciate the help they receive from teachers, such as the extra lunchtime sessions, and clearly enjoy the subject. The retention rate is therefore high.

165. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have a very good command of their subject, and prepare lessons thoroughly. Good strategies are used to involve students in the lessons, for instance in the delivery of model answers. Students readily question their peers, to the mutual benefit of all. A very good working atmosphere develops in lessons. Coursework is very detailed, and of a high standard. There are regular



assessments of students' knowledge and understanding using past examination questions. This prepares students thoroughly for their module tests. Detailed records are maintained of each student's progress compared with their target grades, so that any under-achievement can be quickly identified and overcome. There is effective use of computers for spreadsheets, and for word processing, but more hardware is needed in one of the laboratories. There is very good and regular application of number in calculations, and in evaluating results using graphs. Students use formulae confidently. Students' communication skills are improved through the preparation of essays on individual topics, for instance in relating physics to the world of sport.

166. Curriculum leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is very good teamwork within the subject, with both teachers contributing to curriculum development, thereby ensuring good progression in the work. There is detailed analysis of examination data to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Lesson observations result in discussions about improving strategies for learning. Even revision lessons are therefore stimulating, requiring students to think carefully about their answers. The quality of textbooks is very good, but there are still some shortages in equipment, placing some restrictions on students' access to practical work. Although one of the laboratories requires updating, there has been good overall progress in the subject since the previous inspection.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision for the Year 12 key skills course in ICT is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good and students are keen to learn.
- All students have an opportunity to pass an examination in ICT.
- Teachers do not use assessment effectively to promote learning.
- The time allocated limits continuity and achievement.

## Commentary

167. Standards are average for students at this stage. The students' performance in class and the work in folders show that most are likely to pass the examination, and a good proportion will reach the higher level.
168. Achievement is satisfactory as students enter the course with average knowledge and skills overall. All Year 12 students take the course and a small proportion has previously passed the Applied GCSE examination in ICT, so the spread of ability is wide. They are sound users of word processing, spreadsheets, electronic mail and the Internet. Achievement is limited by the fact that lessons are only once a fortnight, and can be disrupted by examinations. One group, for example, had had only three lessons in the first term. Students make good use of their well-above average communication skills and ability to manipulate numbers, so that their progress in developing an understanding of spreadsheets, for example, is rapid.
169. Teaching is good overall, and sometimes very good. The lessons are consistently well planned and the expert teachers make very good use of the resources to provide for the wide range of prior attainment. Students appreciate the interactive whiteboard, which is used to combine a variety of information sources. Most lessons are lively and the teachers make good use of the high levels of literacy and numeracy to set a challenging pace. Relationships are very good and students work well. They are made aware of the requirements of the examination and their work is marked. However, the lack of a regular assessment programme means that target setting for individual students is limited. For example, whilst students are happy to practice their skills outside the lessons, they have not been put under the same pressure to achieve as they might on an A-level or AVCE course.
170. The leadership of the key skills course is satisfactory. The acting leader provides a good role model and a good level of support for the other teachers. There is effective teamwork. The course is appropriate in that it helps the students catch up on knowledge and skills they missed earlier but there is not yet a clear vision of how the school wants move forward.
171. There was no taught ICT at the time of the previous inspection so this course has provided satisfactory improvement.

## HUMANITIES

*The focus subjects were psychology and sociology. Work in history, philosophy of religion, and geography was sampled.*

172. The **history** A-level results have been above average over the past three years, and similar standards are evident in the work seen during the inspection. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching, and good leadership and management. In a sampled Year 13 **geography** lesson, standards were well above average, reflecting good teaching, stimulating materials and high student engagement, demonstrated by their responses to challenging questions.
173. In a Year 12 **philosophy of religion** lesson, the teaching was very good, with an excellent focus on how language is used in philosophical argument. The level of challenge was very good and, as a result, the majority of students were fully engaged and participated enthusiastically in debate. They showed evidence of very good

understanding of different models of God in quoting from the works of philosophers from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Standards are well above average for this point in the course, and their achievement is very good.

## Psychology

The provision for psychology is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCE A-level results are well above average and achievement is very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good and sometimes excellent. Students make very good progress in lessons.
- Assessment is thorough and systematic. Data are used very well to track progress and set targets.
- The curriculum is well planned to provide interest and relevance.
- Very good leadership and management result in consistently high standards.

### Commentary

174. The A-level results have been well above average over the last three years including 2003, which is the last year for which validated data are available. Students consistently achieve very well in psychology, doing significantly better than in the other subjects that they take. The number taking the subject has increased dramatically since the previous inspection, and retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are very good.

175. Current standards seen in Year 13 are above rather than well above average, but reflect very good achievement when compared with students' lower than average prior attainment at GCSE. Students have very good knowledge and understanding of a range of psychological concepts, theories and research. Year 13 students for example, confidently compared and evaluated a number of relevant theories and studies when explaining reasons for phobias. The standards being reached by Year 12 students are particularly impressive, given that they have begun their study of psychology fairly recently. In the lessons seen, they readily grasped issues relating to the causes, impact and control of stress, and had a good knowledge of research findings. Written work includes well-structured answers to questions. Higher attaining students are particularly strong in supporting their views by drawing on comparisons and evaluations of research studies. The work of lower attaining students tends to be stronger on knowledge and understanding than on the application and evaluation of theories and research, and sometimes confuses these. This is partly why observed standards are currently lower than recent results. Overall however, written work provides good accurate detail; communication skills are very good, as are those of numeracy.

176. Teaching and learning are very good. Students respond very well to the teacher's high expectations and challenge. They enjoy their learning and are inspired by the teachers' very good knowledge and enthusiasm. This results in clear presentations and explanations, and lively exchanges. Lessons are well planned. A good range of activities ensures that all students are fully involved. Well-planned group work is effective in fostering discussion and peer support. Learning thrives in a very good atmosphere. Classroom relationships are excellent. Skilled questioning extends thinking and results in students working at demanding levels. Topics are consistently linked to psychological theories and research with a strong emphasis on the evaluation of these. Very clear explanation of the standards needed at the highest GCE A-level grades, encourages students to achieve these. The assessment of their progress is rigorous, and data is used very well to track progress and set targets. Marking gives very good guidance for improvement.

177. Curriculum leadership is very good. The high standards in achievement, teaching and learning result from the very clear direction given by the head of department. She has an excellent

grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the department, and works very closely with the other teachers in monitoring teaching and learning, and thus in promoting consistently high quality practice. The curriculum is well planned with very good enhancement through extension opportunities for the most able and enrichment activities such as the psychology club. Resources are appropriate, but accommodation is inadequate for the large number of students taking the subject. The use of non-specialist accommodation across the school places considerable demands on teachers in minimising possible adverse effects on teaching and learning. Very good improvement has been made since the previous inspection in standards, achievement, teaching and learning, the quality of resources and in the significant increase in the number of students taking the subject.

## **Sociology**

Provision in sociology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well because of good teaching and their own positive attitudes.
- Curriculum leadership is good and teachers are committed to raising standards.
- Although students work hard in their lessons, they do not read widely enough at home.

### **Commentary**

178. Results at A-level in 2003, the last year for which validated data were available, were well above average. The provisional results for 2004 show a lower percentage of students achieving A or B grades than did so in 2003 because of problems with coursework.
179. Current standards seen in Years 12 and 13 are above average, and reflect good achievement for all groups of students. Students in Year 13 build well on what they have learnt in Year 12, and are developing a clear understanding of different theoretical traditions. They are beginning to apply a range of theoretical concepts to unfamiliar situations, although the work of lower attaining students shows that they are not completely confident with a wide range of theorists. Students in Year 12 have made a good start to their course and have already made clear gains in their knowledge and understanding. Essay writing skills are above average, but too many students make minor spelling and grammar mistakes that teachers do not correct. Students cope well with using a wide range of sociological evidence, including numerical data, although many rely too much on their teachers to tell them to read independently.
180. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed and use well-chosen evidence to illustrate theories and concepts. During a lesson on the sociology of religion, for example, the discussion focussed on the recent decision of the BBC to show *Jerry Springer: the Opera* in order to help students to make informed conclusions on whether Britain is becoming a more secular society. Because of this good teaching, students show enthusiasm for the subject and are prepared to work hard in lessons. Teachers make good use of questions and discussion to consolidate and challenge students' knowledge and understanding. Although most students are keen to engage in discussion, many do not read widely enough at home, which limits the quality of some of the discussions.

181. Curriculum leadership is good. Teachers are reflective and committed to raising standards. Improvement since the previous inspection, including the quality of planning, is good.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

### **Design and technology**

Provision for sixth form design and technology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching facilitates independent learning.
- An additional A-level in food and nutrition shows response to demand.
- Improving use of ICT is improving design communication.
- There is inconsistency between the two A-level courses in marking and assessment.

### **Commentary**

182. Students may opt for product design or textiles. Standards in the two A-levels are improving. Despite disappointing 2003 results at AS, the 2004 provisional results were well above average. In 2003, A-level results were above average. The provisional results in 2004 show a further improvement and very good value added in relation to the students' prior attainments. Retention rates are good.

183. Scrutiny of work and grades over time shows improving design, modelling and making, illustrating very good achievement for the majority of students. Standards are above average. AS students who were designing and making a child's chair had very effective feedback from younger members of the school, who tested out and evaluated the product to highlight improvements needed. Some students enter the course with low GCSE grades. They develop well and become very good independent designers with the ability to think creatively and solve everyday design problems. Experimental work clarifies students' understanding of materials properties and is beginning to investigate use of 'smart materials'. Computer-aided design and making are having an impact on working drawings and the professional finish of final products. Very good application of complex modelling of nets challenges students' number skills, as seen in scaling work up and down for modelling.

184. Teaching and learning are very good in both subjects offered at A-level. Several teachers are involved in planning and teaching A-level, giving greater diversity to the learning and broadening the students' information base. Teachers facilitate learning and encourage independent decision making through very good research and analysis of consumer need. Teachers with industrial experience inject a commercial appreciation into designing. Textiles students investigated manufacturing through batch production during their involvement with the school production of *Peter Pan*. They took responsibility for costume designing, making, modification, costing and wardrobe; this purposeful activity introduced students to the pressures of specific deadlines and cost implications. Students are inspired by contact with the wider design community; one local designer is keen to have textiles students to visit or on placements because of the high quality finish of their work. There are some inconsistencies with marking and assessment between product design and textiles.

Where students have both verbal and written feedback on a regular basis, their work improves dramatically but wider reading is still an area for development.

185. Curriculum leadership and management are very good. The subject is well planned, and offers courses to meet students' needs and interests. Many students go on to careers in textiles and design and return to school to inspire by example. Analysis of need is constantly under review and has led to a new A-level food and nutrition course being introduced in 2005. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good overall, with textiles students maintaining their very high standards.

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

*The focus subject was art and design. Media studies and music were sampled.*

186. The A-level **media studies** course is a relatively new one in the school, but has had a successful introduction. Provisional results for the 2004 A-level place the school in the highest five per cent of all schools for this subject. Eighty per cent of students attained grades A or B. Similarly high results were obtained in the 2004 AS examination. Two Year 13 lessons were observed. During one of these lessons, teaching, learning and achievement were excellent. Standards were very high. The students responded with relish and enjoyment, making excellent progress in the construction and application of a framework to analyse codes and conventions in the soap opera genre.
187. In A-level **music**, standards have been well above average for the past few years and healthy numbers opt for music at AS and continue to A-level. Two lessons were seen during the inspection where very good teaching led to very good achievement in the lessons, mirrored in the work scrutiny. Sixth formers are fully integrated into the department's work, acting as monitors and running extra-curricular activities.

### **Art and design**

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

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

- Standards have been well above average at A-level and Year 13 work shows similar quality.
- Large numbers of students enter art courses and learn very well in both years.
- Very effective teamwork between staff enables students to refine expertise in a very rich range of creative two- and three-dimensional media.
- By Year 13, students' work develops highly individualistic flair and style.
- The lack of a sixth form studio means that students do not have ready access to work other than in their single-lesson periods.

### **Commentary**

188. Standards on entry to sixth form groups are average. Attainment in 2003 and 2004 A-level examinations was well above average, with a high percentage of A grades. Students often achieve better results than predictions suggest. In both recent years, Year 12 students achieved well, with results at AS above average. Retention on the courses is very good.

189. Standards are well above average in Year 13, representing very good achievement. All students in sixth form courses have come through the main school, and have therefore benefited greatly from the rich range of media available. Most employ very good technical skills in these. They also know staff very well and appreciate the range of expertise that they can tap into for advice and help. Year 12's experimentation with different media shows confident and creative investigative competence. By Year 13, students are well placed to match the very high expectations of their teachers that work will be individualistic and show personal flair. Final pieces, and the research and investigations that underpin these, show students responding highly effectively to these requirements. Personal studies and investigations into many different themes often include primary research that has clearly captured students' interests and imagination. Use of creative ICT work as an element of students' portfolios is satisfactory. New facilities for photography and new computers in the department now add further opportunities to extend the range of media represented in students' work. The students' mathematical competence is good, with communicative abilities in written format such as personal investigations, also above average. Some Year 12 students' oral contributions in lessons were less effective, and this aspect is average overall.
190. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are very good, reflecting similar characteristics to those described in the main school. Teachers have very high expectations of students, providing very good levels of challenge to explore ideas and media creatively. The limitations imposed by students having no dedicated sixth form studio, are minimised by staff allowing access to rooms when other classes are working. Whilst teachers do not permit this to compromise standards, it is inconvenient because it means that students do not have ready access to work in progress. Single 60-minute lessons exacerbate these difficulties, creating a stop-start structure, but all manage this constraint very effectively. Assessment in the sixth form is very good, being tightly tied to examination assessment objectives, and forming a significant element of the very effective dialogue between staff and students in all lessons. Relationships between staff and students are very mature and harmonious, with a sense of enjoyment and self-fulfilment pervading the learning environment. A high proportion of students moves into higher education courses in the visual arts
191. As in the main school, very good leadership is a key strength. The teaching team has been carefully recruited to provide a very challenging range of expertise and personal competence amongst staff. This is very effectively exploited in the sixth form, with students regarding the team as a whole one, any of whom can be approached for effective advice and help, regardless of who is their class teacher. The head of department's national profile is an excellent role model for students and for other staff. The excellent range of exciting exhibitions, in school and elsewhere, and of the department's involvement with outside organisations through work such as the annual sculpture trails, all add impressively to sixth formers' experience. The very high standards described in the last report have been sustained and the range of media extended. Improvement has been good.

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

*The focus was on the new vocational course in travel and tourism. Three lessons of physical education were also sampled.*

192. Teaching and learning in **physical education** were very good, a consequence of very good knowledge, challenging questions and very positive student attitudes. The practical teaching with Years 12 and 13 was excellent as they responded very well to

demanding situations in fielding and catching activities. Students very successfully apply theory and practice, as seen when studying factors about the anxious sports competitor. In lessons seen, achievement was very good. The A-level results over the last four years have been consistently well above average. Provisional data for 2004 show that the standards have been maintained.

### **Vocational travel and tourism**

Provision in vocational travel and tourism is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Mutual respect and supportive teaching encourage effective learning.
- The teacher has good subject knowledge.
- Students need to have more regular practical learning activities.

### **Commentary**

193. As this AVCE course only commenced in September 2004 it is not possible to comment on examination results or recent trends. In work seen in the inspection standards are broadly average and all students have remained on the course.

194. The current students started this course below average and are now broadly average, so achievement is good. The students have a good understanding of the characteristics of world tourism and the employment features of the travel industry. They discuss confidently and respond well in question and answer work, often making links to their own travel experiences. Their writing is of a lower standard, and they rely too much on prepared materials. They are able to offer good descriptions, but detailed evaluations tend to be rather simplistic. Their application of number skills are well supported by good use of graphs and statistics, which students interpret effectively. While writing is brief, communication is enhanced by regular use of key words and good oral work to check understanding. There is no evidence of any underachievement by any students, all of whom are achieving in line with, or better than, their expected outcomes.

195. Teaching and learning are good. Students benefit from well planned lessons and the good subject knowledge of the teacher, who uses a wide range of case studies to heighten interest and encourage discussion. Students respond enthusiastically to questions and share ideas through collaborative work in small groups. The warm supportive environment and the high level of mutual respect ensure that students are given confidence in their own abilities and lower attainers are very willing to take risks and offer ideas without fear. Good encouragement is given to them to discuss the moral and social issues linked to expanding tourism in the less developed world. Attitudes are consistently good, and students are keen to learn seeing the relevance of this course to their future employment. The course now needs to expand beyond the classroom and create opportunities for hands-on work in practical situations in the world of travel or tourism. Plans are being formulated to do this. Students' work is thoroughly marked, and they are given good advice on the examination needs and how to improve their own performance.

196. Subject leadership is good, with the teacher having a sense of vision for this new course and high expectations for its success and that of the students. Planning,



organisation and the preparation of appropriate teaching materials are good while the course is being regularly reviewed and developed as it becomes established. The subject was not inspected previously but at this early stage of its life in the school progress is good.

## **BUSINESS**

*Business studies and economics were sampled.*

197. In recent years, A-level examination results in both subjects have been well above average, representing very good achievement in relation to the students' GCSE profiles; retention rates are good. Results for the AVCE course have also been well above average. In the two lessons seen, teaching and learning were very good, with the teachers' excellent subject and course knowledge a major factor in keeping expectations high. The Year 12 **economics** students showed confident numeracy skills when dealing with theoretical models. The Year 13 **business studies** lesson was marked by the excellent use of examination materials to allow students to mark work for themselves, and to learn how to improve their own answers in an imminent module examination.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

