

INSPECTION REPORT

THE KING EDWARD VI SCHOOL

Morpeth

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122365

Headteacher: Mrs J Mann

Lead inspector: Mr I Thompson

Dates of inspection: 7th – 11th March 2005

Inspection number: 268973

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

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Terms used in this report

*Students in Year 9 are at **Key Stage 3**, having transferred from their middle schools after Year 8. Students in Years 10 and 11 are at **Key Stage 4** of their education. Students in Years 9 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for students of all ages at the school.*

*At the end of Year 9, students aged 14 take national tests in English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the students know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, students 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 students by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for students of the same age nationally. The judgements about students' **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.*

Efforts have been made to minimise the use of abbreviations, though some have been used. Throughout the report, ICT refers to information and communication technology; PSHE refers to personal, social and health education. Comparisons to national averages are based on data for the academic year 2002/2003 for national tests at the end of Year 9 and 2003/2004 for GCSE.

Little reference is made to students for whom English is an additional language. Few students are from backgrounds where English is not the first language of at least one parent. Only two are at the early stages of English language acquisition.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Voluntary controlled
Age range of students: 13 – 18
Gender of students: Mixed
Number on roll: 1397

School address: Cottingwood Lane
Morpeth
Northumberland
Postcode: NE61 1DN

Telephone number: 01670 515415
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Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Dr R Vaughan

Date of previous inspection: 22nd February 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The King Edward VI School is a larger than average, 13-18 mixed comprehensive school with a much larger than average sixth form. Students' standards on entry to the school are broadly average across the full range of capability. The school serves the town of Morpeth and a very wide surrounding rural area. Students' social and economic backgrounds are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged overall but a substantial minority of students come from areas of considerable social and economic deprivation. Four students are in public care. There are 1397 students on roll, 441 of whom are in the sixth form. Below average proportions of students join or leave the school at other than the usual times. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The majority of students are white. Some 21 students are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds with no groups of significant size among them. Two students are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students on the school's register of special educational needs is well below average but the proportion with statements of special educational need is about average.

In addition to being a Leading Edge school, King Edward VI is a specialist arts and technology college and is leading or participating in a number of local and national initiatives aimed at raising standards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
12271	I Thompson	Lead inspector	
19743	A Taylor	Lay inspector	
19913	R Garrett	Team inspector	Performing arts
8341	W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics
17799	A Stoddart	Team inspector	Science; post-16 physics
10894	P Reynolds	Team inspector	Design and technology
32211	B Geoghegan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
2928	W Baxendale	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
33019	S Aspinall	Team inspector	Citizenship; geography
30427	F Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	History
30749	H Boyle	Team inspector	Art and design
18846	P Priest	Team inspector	Music
33930	L Blakelock	Team inspector	Religious education
30800	B Colley	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language
22985	J Sparkes	Team inspector	Post-16 chemistry
1819	R Crowther	Team inspector	Post-16 psychology
22695	R Cardinal	Team inspector	Post-16 business studies; government and politics
19214	G Price	Team inspector	English
32912	J Hall	Team inspector	Physical education

The inspection contractor was:

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS	10
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	15
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	24
OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES	25
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	27
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	58

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides a very good standard of education. Very good leadership by the headteacher provides clear direction and the school has many strengths. Standards are above average in Year 9 and well above average in Year 11 and in the sixth form. Students achieve well as they move through the school and personal development is very good. **The school provides very good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school is very well led by the headteacher and well managed.
- Relationships are very good and the school provides a very good climate for learning. Teaching and learning are good and very good in the sixth form.
- Achievement is good in Years 9 to 11 and very good in the sixth form leading to well above average standards overall.
- The school's self-evaluation procedures are not sharply enough focused to ensure accuracy.
- Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good. Attitudes and behaviour are very good.
- There are too many weaknesses in the provision for religious education. Statutory requirements are not met in the sixth form.
- Support for learning outside the school day and opportunities for enrichment are excellent.
- Students benefit from the school's excellent links with the community and very good links with other schools and colleges.

Improvement since the previous inspection in February 1999 has been good. The key issues have been tackled effectively except in relation to religious education. Well above average standards have been maintained. Teaching is better with a higher proportion that is very good. The school has acquired specialist college status for the arts as well as for technology and has become a Leading Edge school.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

The achievement of all students, including those with special educational needs, is good. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average in Year 9 and well above average in Year 11. Current students achieve well as they move through the school. Students reach well above average standards in the sixth form and achieve very well in relation to their standards at the start of their courses.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Overall, students have very good attitudes and behave very well. Attendance is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a very good quality of education. Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement; in the sixth form, teaching, learning and achievement are very good. Good assessment helps to raise standards. Curricular opportunities are good and the school provides excellent opportunities for enrichment. The provision of extra-curricular activities and support for learning outside the school day are excellent. The school makes very good arrangements for students' care and guidance with very good arrangements for seeking their views. The school makes exceptionally good use of business partnerships, other opportunities in the community and very good links with other schools and colleges to support learning; its partnership with parents is very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides very clear educational direction. Governors provide very good support for the work of the school. Financial management is very good. The school puts considerable effort into self-evaluation but evaluations are not consistently accurate.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students express a high level of satisfaction with the work of the school. Parents believe that it is a very good school in which their children do well although they do have concerns about the structure of the curriculum. The inspection team agrees with parents' positive views but feels that the curriculum serves students' needs well. Students believe the school to be good. They value the wide range of extra-curricular activities. They feel that they are well taught and enjoy the school's positive atmosphere and relationships. Inspectors agree with these views. A minority expressed concerns about bullying but during the inspection acknowledged that the few incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- improve provision for religious education in Years 9 to 11;
- improve the consistency and accuracy of self-evaluation.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide religious education for all sixth form students

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE KING EDWARD VI SCHOOL

The sixth form with 441 students is much larger than most sixth forms. The school strongly holds the view that students should have the opportunity to pursue a sixth form education and as a result students join it with a wide range of attainment and capability. The sixth form offers 28 GCE AS and A-level courses, including general studies, and vocational courses in business, health and social care and leisure and tourism. Twelve subjects (the focus subjects) were inspected in detail in this inspection.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a sixth form that makes very good provision for its students. Students are achieving very well, teaching is very good and income exceeds costs. The sixth form is, therefore, very cost-effective. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good because the strong features of the previous report have been maintained and many developed further.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good because of very good teaching, very good assessment, and students' very good attitudes to learning.
- Very good leadership operates on the basis that students who show a keen interest in sixth form education are welcomed, and as a result students benefit from the inclusive nature of the sixth form and the breadth of opportunity it offers.
- Committed and efficient management ensures that students are monitored closely and cared for and guided very well so that they fulfil their potential and consistently obtain well above average results.
- Students' personal development is enhanced very well through outstanding enrichment activities and excellent links with the community.
- Contrary to statutory requirements, there is still no provision for religious education in the sixth form and this prevents students having any experience of the subject.

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	English literature – Good. Standards are well above average. Good teaching and positive attitudes ensure that students achieve well. The subject is a popular choice and students speak highly of the course. French – Very good. Standards are well above average. Very good teaching and learning help students speak and write with commendable fluency and accuracy. Achievement is very good.
Mathematics	Mathematics – Good. As a result of good teaching and very positive attitudes students achieve well. Good leadership and management ensure that students' progress is assessed and supported very well.
Science	Chemistry – Good. Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement. Students are highly motivated, and results and standards are above average. Physics – Good. Standards are above average. Teaching and learning are good. Students' attitudes are very good and contribute to their good achievement. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
Humanities	Government and politics – Very good. Standards are well above average

	<p>representing very good achievement by students, none of whom have studied the subject previously. Teaching is very good; students respond with very positive attitudes and learn very well.</p> <p>History – Very good. Standards in history are above average. Results have been steadily improving and very good teaching is resulting in very good achievement.</p> <p>Psychology – Very good. Very well led and managed provision has maintained well above average performance for an increasing number of students. Teaching is very good, leading to very good learning and achievement.</p>
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Design and technology – Good. Students' very good attitudes and motivation contribute significantly to their good achievement. Teachers support students' learning very well. Links with local companies are good and bring practical opportunities that benefit students well.
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Art and design – Very good. Standards have improved and students reach high standards of creativity in graphics. Teachers' very good support, encouragement and use of ICT are major factors in students' very good achievement.</p> <p>Performance studies – Very good. Standards are well above average representing very good achievement by students who often have no experience of at least one of the elements of this demanding course. Teaching is very good and fosters students' talents very well.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Subjects in this curriculum area were not a focus for this inspection.
Business	Business studies – Very good. Standards are above average representing very good achievement by students given their starting points. Teaching and leadership and management are very good and their combined impact on developing independent learning is very effective.
<p><i>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'.</i></p>	

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Very good. Careful monitoring, tracking and reviewing of progress takes place at regular intervals throughout students' sixth form education. As a result, individual students are well known and supported very well. Students are given very good guidance about course choices, higher education and employment at the appropriate points.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Very good. Leadership is clearly focused on meeting the needs of individual students, assuring the quality of provision and offering opportunities to students with a wide range of prior attainment. Committed and efficient management ensures that students are monitored closely and cared for and guided very well so that they can fulfil their potential.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Very good. Students appreciate the quality of teaching and learning and helpful assessment of their work. Some negative responses in their questionnaire were not repeated by students when they spoke to inspectors – on the contrary, students appreciate the very good support they receive and the relationships they establish. They value their sixth form experience highly.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average in Year 9 representing good achievement in relation to students' standards when they joined the school. In Year 11, standards are well above average. Achievement is good in relation to students' standards when they began their courses in Year 10. Standards in the sixth form are well above average and students achieve well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well as they move through the school.
- Students with special educational needs, the gifted and talented and those with English as an additional language are supported well so that they make similarly good progress to others.
- The school's initiatives to raise boys' achievement are leading to improvement.

Commentary

1. In national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, results were above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science. Girls did better than boys and the gap in performance was greater than found nationally. Overall, results were well above average in comparison with all schools nationally but average in relation to students' performance at the end of Year 6 because the overall figure was held down by results in English. Results in English have shown a steady decline over the last four years while national results have been rising. Results for 2004 show improved performances in mathematics and science and a halt to the fall in English results. Results were much the same, in relation to national figures, as at the time of the previous inspection.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.9 (35.0)	33.3 (33.4)
mathematics	39.3 (38.2)	35.5 (35.4)
science	37.1 (36.3)	33.1 (33.6)

There were 330 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. GCSE results in 2004 were well above average overall. In comparison with schools that had similar scores in national tests at the end of Year 9, results were average overall but above average for the award of five or more grades A*-C. Girls did better than boys overall but the gap in performance was less than found nationally and boys' results were further above their national average than girls'. The closing of the gap in performance that existed at the end of Year 9 shows the effectiveness of the school's initiatives aimed at raising boys' achievement. There has been an improvement in the school's results, in relation to national figures, since the previous inspection. Students' achievement over Years 9 to 11 was good.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	76 (71)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95 (95)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	41.3 (42.1)	34.9 (34.7)

There were 327 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are well above average in mathematics, music and science. They are above average in all other subjects except design and technology, ICT, physical education and religious education, in which they are average. Achievement is good overall in relation to students' standards at the beginning of Year 9. In Year 11, standards are well above average in all subjects except citizenship, design and technology, ICT and physical education in which they are above average and religious education in which they are average. Achievement is good overall in relation to students' standards at the end of Year 9. It is very good in art and design, geography, history, modern foreign languages and music in response to very good teaching
4. Most students come from white British backgrounds; a very small minority come from other ethnic backgrounds. The few students whose home language is other than English and who are at an early stage of learning English achieve as well as other students because they are supported well. There is no specialist teaching provided for this small minority but there is good guidance and support provided by learning support assistants and the learning support coordinator. The school places good emphasis on providing opportunities for a range of learning styles and this benefits students at an early stage of learning English.
5. Gifted and talented students achieve well. In most subjects high expectations and good opportunities for additional challenge are helping to raise their standards and achievement. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students. They do well, as seen when results at GCSE are compared to test results on entry into the school in Year 9. Learning support assistants and trained sixth form students help specialist subject teachers to provide guidance in lessons to help students with special educational needs to achieve well. Some students, especially in Years 10 and 11, have help in special support lessons and this concentrated support helps them to complete coursework and homework so that they achieve very well. In most subjects, students achieve well because teachers know them well and plan effectively for their needs. In a minority of subjects students do not achieve as well because of the lack of specialist support and the lack of specific planning. Record sheets are being developed well to collect data and unite information from all possible sources to raise achievement and promote improvement; as a result, target setting in departments is starting to be more specific in the identification of students' needs to support individuals.

Sixth form

Well above average standards have been maintained since the previous inspection and achievement is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good overall because of very good teaching.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students and very good assessment, support and encouragement contribute to achievement.

Commentary

6. Results in A-level examinations in 2004 were well above average overall. In all subjects, except economics and information technology, the proportion of A or B grades was above or well above average. Particularly successful subjects in 2004 with well above average results were English language and English literature, French, design and technology, general studies, geography, music and sociology. Art and design, biology, chemistry, classical civilisation, communication studies, history and physics all had above average results. Other subjects obtained average results except for economics, which was below average. Results in the vocational course for business studies were well above average. The overall picture based on average points score was an improvement on the previous year. Results at AS-level were not as strong but still above average overall. Taking AS and A-level performance together, students in English language, design and technology and French have performed consistently well over recent years.

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	93.0 (94.6)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	44.2 (42.6)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	345.2 (301.2)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 189 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

7. For present students, standards are well above average overall. In the subjects inspected in detail (the focus subjects) standards are well above average in English literature, French, art and design, performance studies, government and politics, and psychology, and above average in mathematics, chemistry, physics, design and technology, history and business studies. Overall, achievement is very good in relation to students' wide range of prior attainment and their capabilities. Students' achievement is enhanced particularly well by teachers' subject expertise and their very effective use of 'assessment for learning' techniques. Very good relationships between teachers and students and very good assessment, support and encouragement are often significant factors contributing to students' achievement.
8. Students with special educational needs are encouraged to join the sixth form. There is very good transition from the main school and continuity in their learning. They achieve well because they are monitored very well. Students are secure in knowing that all teachers know them well so that they receive good support when required. Very good arrangements are made for the provision of extra facilities and resources.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)

Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good, overall. Their attendance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students are keen and enthusiastic learners who are proud of their school.
- Relationships are very strong; this results in a friendly, supportive learning community.
- Behaviour is very good; most students successfully conform to the high standards expected.
- Attendance is good as parents are supportive and most students value education. There is very good support for the minority of irregular attenders.
- Spiritual development is good; moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Commentary

9. Students have very good attitudes to their work. Often they 'spark off' each other and this infectious enthusiasm adds an extra vibrancy to lessons. They lead busy lives, taking full advantage of the excellence of the extra-curricular and enrichment programmes the school provides. They are resourceful, good at finding out things for themselves and working independently. Students are well versed in assessing their work to see how they are doing and good at assessing each other's work, too. This is because of the school's clear focus on the 'assessment for learning' initiative.
10. Although most students enter this school in Year 9 with a strong work ethic, the school has to work very hard to produce it from some. A substantial proportion is less mature than might be expected. In fact, students' response in lessons is rather less positive in Year 9 than elsewhere in the school.
11. Behaviour is very good, overall. By the time they are in Year 10, students are generally more settled and largely conform to the school's high expectations. It is to the school's credit that it copes very well with a significant minority whose behaviour can be very challenging. Most teachers manage classes very well and promote good behaviour because relationships are very good. Students' very good attitudes and behaviour are significant factors in helping them to achieve well.

Exclusions

12. Use of temporary exclusions is about average, compared with other schools. They are only used in extreme cases of verbal abuse, aggression or intimidation, according to school policy. A number of students have been excluded for a fixed period more than once. The school would rather take this kind of action than exclude them permanently, which they very rarely do.

Ethnic background of students

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean

Exclusions in the last school year

No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1358	70	0
2	0	0
7	0	0
1	0	0

Mixed – White and Asian	5	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	5	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	9	0	0

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

13. The school makes personal development a high priority and, as a consequence, students are confident individuals who work well together. Teachers involve students in a range of activities that enable them to develop good skills of collaboration.
14. Students respond well to opportunities for reflection in assemblies and in many areas of the curriculum they are given the time to appreciate the new discoveries they make. The choice of poems and texts studied in the English department, for example, provides very good opportunities for contemplation. The excellent opportunities for musical performance enable students to develop their self-esteem and enjoy the experience of personal achievement. In history, study of the Holocaust provides a very good opportunity to think about the lessons that can be learned by contemplation of the past.
15. The moral development of students is very good. Students have a wide variety of opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community and to take responsibility for the welfare of others. The 'Get Active Programme' for Year 11 encourages students to become involved, and fundraising activities such as 'Operation Christmas Child' enable a significant proportion of the school to contribute and to take an active role in charitable activity. Moral issues are discussed in many subjects, such as in geography where they consider the impact of our actions on the world today. Despite the large numbers, students move about the school in an orderly fashion and most treat their peers with courtesy.
16. The school is providing very good opportunities for the social development of students. The wide range of extra-curricular activities provides very good opportunities to foster social skills. The outdoor education teacher and the Youth and Community programme extend these opportunities beyond the school day, providing challenge and new experiences. Students are enthusiastic and keen to support activities. They are willing to show initiative and to take responsibility.
17. The school provides very good opportunities for students to develop an appreciation of their own culture through music, drama, art and English in particular. The school is rightly proud of its musical achievements. Both through listening and performing, students develop an appreciation of music and it is used to enhance the work of the school. A very good example was the performance at the 'Commemoration Day' service. Through art and design they develop an appreciation of Oriental and Indonesian design that they incorporate into their own work. They have good opportunities to travel abroad, for example on tour with the school orchestra, but opportunities to celebrate the multi-cultural diversity of Britain are limited.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.8	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.

18. Students' attendance is above average compared to other schools nationally and is good. They are prompt to lessons and timekeeping is good.
19. The school works hard on monitoring and encouraging those students whose attendance is liable to be sporadic. A minority of students do have significant attendance problems and they are very well supported by a number of different staff, especially the home school link worker.

Sixth form

Attitudes to learning and behaviour are very good. Students are very well motivated and have a mature and independent approach to their work. Students' personal development is very good. Attendance and punctuality are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships, attitudes and behaviour at all levels are very good, and play an important part in students achieving very well.
- Students' personal development is enhanced very well through outstanding enrichment activities and their own involvement in the life of the school and the community.

Commentary

20. Students' very good attitudes and behaviour contribute positively to their learning. They readily acknowledge the considerable personal support they receive which keeps them well motivated and focused. Very positive relationships exist between students and their teachers. These features play an important part in students achieving very well.
21. Provision for moral, social and cultural development in the sixth form is very good. Provision for spiritual development is good. Opportunities for spiritual development are reduced by the lack of religious education in the sixth form, but other subjects such as English, where students study the work of the war poets, provide opportunities for reflection and spiritual development.
22. Students have very good opportunities for personal development, and use their confidence and sense of responsibility to support the work of the main school. As subject representatives, as Year 9 'buddies', as reading helpers, sports leaders and leaders in the school council, they make a significant contribution to the development of the younger students. In doing so they are developing their own sense of responsibility and self-esteem. The 'Millennium Volunteer Challenge' is encouraging a significant proportion of the students to experience the satisfaction of community

service. The environmental projects they undertake lead them to consider the needs of the locality, and to be involved in wider community projects. The rising numbers following the government and politics course demonstrate an interest in politics, but those not following the subject have little opportunity to develop their understanding of their role in the government of the country.

23. Students are influential in the life of the school, in particular the life of the sixth form itself. Their role in running KEV1 radio enables them to be at the heart of social events in the school. A harmonious community, they organise their own social activities and use them to raise funds for charitable causes and their own activities. Their involvement in the organisation of the inter-house and form sporting competitions in the main school provides very good opportunities to work with younger students although they do not have similar competitions in the sixth form.
24. Opportunities for the cultural development of students are very good. Sixth formers are fully involved in the extra-curricular activities of the school and their support for the performing arts is enriching the school's appreciation of the arts. Those on the performance studies course gain culturally and in personal maturity and confidence. Students have very good opportunities to travel, enhancing their confidence and widening their horizons. The art trip to America, the orchestra's European tour and the history visits to Poland and Rome are significant experiences that encourage appreciation of other cultures.

Attendance

Attendance is good. There are good procedures for checking on those students who are absent and for supporting them when they return after extended absence.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a very good quality of education. The curriculum is good overall with excellent enrichment. Students receive very good advice, guidance and support. The partnership with parents is very good. The school has excellent links with business and the community. Links with other schools and colleges are very good.

Teaching and learning

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know their subjects very well.
- Teachers' very good support and encouragement help students to do well.
- The great majority of students bring very good attitudes to their work in response to teachers' expectations.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 158 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
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10 (6%)	57 (36%)	67 (42%)	20 (13%)	4 (3%)	0	0
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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.

25. Overall, the quality of teaching is good so that students learn well and make good progress as they move through the school. Teaching is not quite as good in Year 9 as it is in other years and this is where the small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. In all but a few cases, teachers use their very good knowledge of their subjects to plan lessons that are interesting and appropriately challenging. In the best lessons teachers use a variety of methods that cater for the different ways in which students learn best. Most teachers manage their classes very well, building on very good relationships. Students generally respond by bringing very good attitudes to their work so that little time is wasted in dealing with unacceptable behaviour. In the unsatisfactory lessons, planning did not meet students' needs well enough so that pace and behaviour deteriorated and not enough progress was made. The great majority of students behave very well and have very good attitudes. Nevertheless, teachers do have to deal with a minority of difficult students who have challenging behaviour. This is much more evident in Year 9 than elsewhere in the school. The pace of otherwise satisfactory lessons is occasionally slowed, and the learning of all adversely affected, because teachers have to establish and reinforce the school's expectations of behaviour. By the time students have been in the school for a year, secure relationships and the school's code of behaviour have been established well. As a result, lessons in Years 10 and 11 have a more consistently purposeful atmosphere. Across the school, teachers are active in supporting and encouraging students so that they respond well to the challenges of lessons and are enabled to succeed.
26. The teaching of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes is good. The quality of teaching and support means that these students achieve as well as others. Teachers are supplied with good information and know students well. Most teachers are effective in the use of individual education plans, created through regular reviews of students' needs. Learning support assistants and sixth form students who provide additional support are effective in lessons because they are experienced, well trained, make good contributions and know the needs of students well. Homework is very well supported at lunchtimes; after-school activities are planned well to extend learning. Sixth formers assist students in Year 9 with paired reading and records show that this is particularly effective in raising achievement.
27. Assessment is good. The school provides a good range of data to enable comparisons to be made against national benchmarks and for individual progress and achievement to be identified. Most subjects are thorough and constructive in their procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress. The school's assessment for learning policy is being well implemented; marking of students' work usually provides good information about their standards and what they need to do to improve their work. Procedures for assessing students with special educational needs are good. Target setting is firmly established across the school.
28. Senior and middle managers, and most subject teachers, make good use of the available assessment information to respond effectively to the needs of students. In most subjects, assessment information is being used well by middle managers for reviewing the performance of students on their courses and taking action to plan for

improvement. Very good assessment practice exists in geography, music and modern foreign languages.

Sixth form

In the focus subjects, teaching is very good overall, and students learn and achieve very well as a result. Students' work is assessed very well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships between teachers and students promote very good attitudes, confidence and motivation.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and use of assessment are often very good and help students learn and achieve very well.

Commentary

29. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects are often very good. Concepts are very clearly explained so that students learn very well as, for example, in performance studies. Very good relationships exist between teachers and students and as a result most students have very good attitudes to their work that play a significant part in their achievement. This is the case in all the focus subjects, and a strength of sixth form provision. Teachers provide much effective support for learning as in design and technology, art and design and business studies. In chemistry, resources have not caught up with increasing group sizes so that students often have to share equipment during practical sessions or have insufficient ICT facilities. The limitations of classroom accommodation in physics prevent teachers from exploring a wider range of strategies. Teachers work hard to overcome these restrictions and still deliver effective lessons.
30. Assessment is very good. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment are very good in most subjects. The available data is used well to enable comparisons to be made against national benchmarks and for individual student achievement. Students' standards and achievement are closely monitored and good systems are in place to chart students' academic progress. Value added approaches and target setting are well established. Very good use is made of the available assessment information by senior and middle managers and most subject teachers, who respond effectively to the individual needs of students. Marking is thorough and usually linked well to examination criteria, though occasionally it does not give students sufficient information on how to improve. In most subjects assessment is used very well for lesson planning and to inform students directly about their progress. Very good examples are art and design, business studies and psychology.

The curriculum

The school's curriculum is good overall with excellent enrichment. Accommodation is sufficient for curriculum needs and is of a satisfactory standard overall. The match of staffing to the curriculum is good and provision of learning resources is also good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Innovative curriculum leadership has resulted in a curriculum that includes a good range of courses and excellent enrichment opportunities that contribute to a very good quality of education.

- Links with the community and partnerships with educational institutions and business greatly enhance learning opportunities.
- Accommodation in physical education is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

31. The school's curricular provision is good. Technology college status has supported the development of the curriculum well, particularly in the development of ICT to support learning. The school has established many partnerships with other schools, colleges, universities, industry and the community that are central to the school's curricular development and play a significant part in the development of other schools through the Leading Edge initiative. Departments have established high quality links with the middle schools to ensure smooth progress in learning from Year 8 to Year 9.
32. The curriculum is reviewed well to ensure that it meets the school's aims and improvements have provided well for the wide range of students' needs. Many students benefit from high quality individual programmes of study developed to meet their needs. This is seen, for example, in the express course in business education, A-level courses provided for students in Years 10 and 11, and also in courses provided for the minority of students for whom GCSE courses are inappropriate. The latter have a larger element of vocational learning, pull together resources in the school and the local college to meet the needs of these students. Further developments are planned for the new academic year.
33. Additional opportunities for gifted and talented students are being developed well. For example, in Year 10 a group of students take a business studies course in half the time. Some subjects extend their learning to raise the interests and ambitions of more able students. For example, resources are deployed in geography so that gifted and talented students can access the Internet for further study and research. Year 11 students attend master classes in mathematics, art and design and science run by Newcastle University, as part of the Aim Higher project. Enrichment opportunities are outstanding for all students and gifted and talented students benefit from the very wide opportunities at high and very high levels that are offered in the majority of subjects.
34. Students with special educational needs have good access to the curriculum. There are good links and communications between departments and special needs support. Students with special educational needs are helped to improve their personal development and social, literacy and numeracy skills in intensive support in Year 9 in particular.
35. Alternative courses to the school curriculum are available in Years 10 and 11. These courses support students' preparation for work by building up students' self-esteem, developing responsibility and confidence, advancing ICT and literacy skills and giving students opportunities of speaking in public and making decisions in problem solving. This is particularly evident on the diploma in digital applications course run in the school and the Prince's Trust course that is jointly organised with local youth workers on the school site. Some students have improved access to the curriculum because they are provided with laptop computers to aid literacy and research possibilities.
36. Extra-curricular provision and enrichment of the curriculum are excellent. There is a comprehensive and wonderful range of opportunities provided by a very committed teaching and support staff. There are sporting, subject and arts-based activities that include school productions with music and singing in performances such as *Grease*.

Support for learning beyond the school day is very good with many departments providing opportunities that extend learning and support personal development very well. In ICT for example, students on the short course can study for a full GCSE qualification after school and at lunchtime an international dimension is introduced through electronic communication with Turkey and Norway. Technical staff also organise activities associated with web design. A science lecture is very well attended every term by students and adults from the community. In art and design, visiting artists run workshops for students. Participation by students in sport is excellent as there is a very wide choice of extra-curricular sporting activities that are well attended. A high standard of rugby was seen in an after-school practice. Attendance on enrichment activities is recorded well and action is taken to ensure all students have the opportunity to participate. Students also participate well in the Duke of Edinburgh award and in outdoor pursuits at the school's own centre.

37. The school occupies several buildings on one site. In many places the buildings are showing signs of wear but the school has made an effort to make the surroundings attractive with fresh colour schemes and attractive displays in corridors and open spaces. The accommodation for teaching is satisfactory or better in all departments except physical education where the gymnasias are unsatisfactory because of crumbling plaster and unsuitable ceiling materials. Cleaning is unsatisfactory because the facilities are used continuously until late evening. However, the most serious deficiency is the complete lack of shower facilities for girls. Playing fields are well turfed but the ground does not drain efficiently, so they become waterlogged in wet weather.
38. Resources to support learning are good. They are at least satisfactory within all departments and good in just over half. This represents good improvement since the previous inspection. ICT provision is very good representing a significant improvement. Good use is made of the local area for fieldwork in history and geography. The learning resource centre contains a good range of books and other resources, representing a good improvement since the previous inspection. An extension of the accommodation has included a significant enhancement of ICT facilities. Resources have been re-organised with a new classification system introduced that has improved ease of access. Very good communication with departments ensures that priorities for developing resources centrally are in line with curriculum requirements. Management of the learning resource centre is very good and succeeds in involving students and stimulating their interest very well.

Sixth form

A good range of courses meets students' needs and aspirations well. There are excellent opportunities for enrichment. Accommodation is satisfactory and resources are good. There is a very good match of teachers to the curriculum.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The sixth form curriculum provides a good range of academic courses and an excellent enrichment programme that match students' needs and interests very well.
- Students have good facilities that support learning and social development well.
- There is no provision for all students to study religious education in the sixth form, contrary to statutory requirements.

Commentary

39. The school offers sixth form education to students of all levels of attainment. A high level of flexibility means that the curriculum meets students' needs and aspirations well. Students can choose from a very large number of GCE AS, A-level and vocational courses. 'Fast tracking' courses are also offered to suitable students and psychology is a good example of the effectiveness of this opportunity. The key skills of communication, application of number and ICT are provided well through subjects. Provision for religious education is unsatisfactory and students' statutory entitlement to this subject is not met.
40. Enrichment is integrated very well in art through college links, community projects and in a field trip to New York. History students visit Auschwitz. Some enrichment activities are competitions. Two students won a national engineering competition earlier this year and will represent the United Kingdom in Russia later this year. More examples are referred to in the section on students' personal development.
41. Accommodation is good overall and resources are satisfactory. The learning resource centre contains a good range of materials including books and journals specifically to support sixth form courses. Resources are easily accessible and well used by sixth formers. There is a very good match of teachers to the needs of the subject curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure students' care and welfare are very good overall. Students receive very good support, advice, and guidance. The extent of the school's involvement of students in its work and development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Innovative systems for mentoring students provide them with a variety of focused academic and pastoral support.
- The student support area (SSA) provides a number of very good support systems, tailored carefully to meet students' individual health, welfare and pastoral needs.
- Staff take time and care to get to know new Year 9 students and their parents, helping them to feel at ease with school procedures; this gives them a good start in the school.
- The school is firmly committed to giving students a voice and, importantly, it listens and responds to their opinions.

Commentary

42. The school cares very well for students' health and well-being. There is a clear undertaking here to educate the 'whole' child that translates into very strong pastoral support and guidance. For example, each day in the SSA, a different agency offers lunchtime counselling sessions, ranging from drug advice, health, smoking cessation, and community police presence. This is in addition to the guidance from staff in the SSA, whose sole intention is help students and their parents. The school's close partnership with Youth Service workers on site provides another useful avenue of guidance. Because of the good working relationship, often youth workers will be directed to students needing advice and direction, feeling they will be better received coming from them rather than school staff. This is where the Youth Service steps in so well.

43. Care for the individual is characterised by the very good systems for helping students settle in to life in Year 9, when they move from middle schools. These systems help to ensure students carry on their learning when they arrive, in the knowledge that niggles and worries have been answered. All students, with their parents, have an interview with senior staff, to answer individual questions and ensure that everyone is clear on school procedures.
44. It is in the school's mentoring and academic guidance systems where there is very innovative and imaginative practice. Under the strong leadership of heads of year, year groups have developed their own 'Learning Promise' based upon expectations for students, parents and year group teams. This sets a high tone for their work. For Year 10, this has resulted in a pledge that students will be supported with GCSE coursework to such a degree that everyone gains a grade C or above. Indications so far are encouraging. Highly structured mentoring programmes for students at risk of underachieving, involving parents every step of the way, extra workshops, after-school sessions and 'master classes', provide very good quality guidance, tightly linked to improving academic achievement.
45. Staff make great efforts to know students well. This means that the significant minority of students who have the potential for becoming disaffected are kept at school and learning. As the head of Year 10 said, "We keep them on board at all costs and do our best for individuals regardless of the workload implications." This is a correct summing up of the provision.
46. Analysis of responses to the student questionnaire identified apparent concerns about bullying. However, in conversation with students, they unanimously disagreed that there was a problem. They were universally complimentary about the support they receive and confident that staff do act to resolve any bullying issues. Inspection findings confirmed this view. The availability of peer counsellors (students specially trained to help others) and the number of staff available for help and guidance show that this is an issue taken seriously.
47. Consulting students and encouraging them to voice their opinions are important aspects of school life that are gathering momentum. The student council is a business-like forum, intent on making changes to help improve school life for students. It is supported well and is taken seriously by the headteacher and staff. The quality of lunchtime food and improving the social areas of the school are currently topical issues. This year for the first time, students were included in the staff and governors' strategic weekend conference, to put forward their views about school development. This was considered a success.

Sixth form

The school provides very good support, advice and guidance.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The great majority of students complete their courses as a result of the very good support and guidance they receive.
- The school takes students' views into account and relationships are very good.

Commentary

48. Students appreciate and value the very good relationships they have with staff who guide them very well during their time in the sixth form. The key to this is in the high quality relationships between staff and students. The fact that retention rates are so high, despite being an extremely large sixth form, is evidence of the very good way individual needs are catered for.
49. This is the first year of a new tutor team, as systems have been reorganised to mix Year 12 students in with Year 13. Although initially causing some anxiety from Year 13 students, systems are bedding down and senior staff have tried to provide extra support for Year 13 students because of this. 'Lead tutors', who are the more experienced members of the team, are directed to provide specific support and guidance for students who are not achieving as well as they should be. There is very good support for those who find it difficult to settle in for a variety of reasons, including providing them with laptop computers on loan, drop-in sessions for subjects, small group tutoring and specialist counselling and advice.
50. Students receive very good guidance about course choices, higher education and employment options. The advice received from a careers specialist, specially employed to guide sixth form students, is highly valued. There are several useful avenues for them to express their points of view, including the school council and the headteacher's weekly meeting with senior students. This ensures their views are heard and responded to, if at all possible.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are very good. Relationships with the community are excellent. Partnerships with other educational establishments are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school holds a special place in the local community for its history, traditions and deservedly strong reputation for a high quality education.
- The way the school influences and works with and for the community is exceptional.
- There are very good links with parents; this school goes 'the extra mile' in order to reach them.
- 'Subject information evenings' focus on raising achievement in innovative ways.
- The school is at the forefront of some very good initiatives that involve working with other schools to improve educational practice.

Commentary

51. Most parents are very supportive of the school and hold it in high regard. They rightly value the very good quality education the school provides. It is regularly oversubscribed, taking students from a wide area. This is a school steeped in traditions, holding a special place at the heart of the community. It is a school where students past and present hold fond memories of their time here, maintaining strong links long after they have left. Setting up a school museum (an idea gleaned from the headteacher's visit to a school in Russia) is helping keep history alive.
52. The excellence of the school's role in the community is a major factor in its success. The school recognises that its relationship with the community it serves is pivotal to all it does. Links are far reaching, both in town and extending to the wider learning community, including businesses large and small. They are far too numerous to mention here. Two long-standing partnerships with major companies exemplify best practice, where school and business benefit equally from their associations. For example, employees develop their confidence and leadership skills through working with the students. These links encompass students in the main school as well as sixth-formers.
53. The willingness of a major pharmaceuticals company to enter into a meaningful relationship with staff and students is paying huge dividends for all. Examples include working on community environmental science projects, experiments on solar, wind and chemical energy, sharing science lectures and workshops, chemistry coursework help and providing real-life situations for students to find solutions to – for example the launch of a new drug and its distribution in a new country. Opportunities like these, and many more besides, are excellent cooperative ventures which are extending students' learning and experiences, by developing enthusiasm, enterprise, and work-related skills.
54. The community education provision is located in school and under its management. The school relishes the further chances for parent and community contact this brings. Students benefit by being able to attend evening courses and many do. The community education sector is always represented at parents' evenings and induction evenings. The message that learning is continual and takes many forms is a strong one at this school. The inclusive approach seen in the school is also part of the ethos here. Recent notable success has been in contacting students who left school with

few qualifications to encourage them back into learning through the adult education system.

55. The school has very good links with parents; this school works hard to maintain contact with them, especially those who live a considerable distance away. The home school link worker acts as an intermediary between parents and school, helping to break down barriers, providing them with transport and encouraging them to come to specially convened parents' meetings. Attendance has improved as a result, where initially there had been little response to standard invitations. Often her work is with those parents whose children are potentially vulnerable. A particularly good example of the school working with parents to help raise standards is through its innovative 'subject information evenings' in Years 10 and 11. These help to inform students how work to improve GCSE grades and they let parents know how to support their children. This is but one strand of a whole range of very good information for parents. Each subject holds a rolling programme of evening workshops for students and their parents, such as 'What makes a successful GCSE geographer?' 'Latin coursework explained', or 'How to maximise your child's potential in business studies'. Students are directed to the workshops that are the most useful for them, after initial discussions with their form tutor. The success lies in the way they are closely aligned to raising achievement. There are, of course, individual appointments with subject teachers if there are real concerns and parents are free to make individual appointments at other times, if they wish.
56. The school is at the forefront of some very good initiatives working with other schools to improve educational practice both locally and internationally. This is through its responsibilities as a Leading Edge school and its specialist school status. Its Leading Edge work has given it the opportunity to work with others, including Newcastle University, to research teaching and learning. One innovative aspect of this work is the strand which involves students (from this and partner schools) becoming researchers, finding out for themselves what helps them learn most effectively.
57. Its links with middle schools are continually being developed and refined, starting from a good baseline. There are regular meetings with departments and much sharing of curriculum approaches. 'Master classes' held at the school, for middle school pupils, have become part of an established tradition.
58. Although its work as a specialist arts school is just starting, its work as a technology college is long established. Through this work, the school's partnership with a local special school will provide their students with access to the GCSE design and technology curriculum. Staff at nearby schools have benefited from joint ICT training events and technical support.

Sixth form

The partnership with parents is very strong and nearly everything mentioned in the main school report applies for sixth form students. Consequently, the provision is very good overall, with excellence in community links.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students benefit from the school's excellent links with the community.

Commentary

59. Parents are fully involved during Years 12 and 13. They accompany students to an in-depth interview before entering the sixth form and the home and school link worker supports students and their families, especially those who take longer to settle in, or have attendance problems.
60. Most students benefit from some kind of community involvement. It is an expectation in the sixth form that students welcome. A good example is their environmental work in the 'Castles, Wood and Water' project, where students made a film about the environment and how it could be improved. Recognising the need for driving theory lessons, the community education section of the school put on specific courses to cater for sixth form students' needs. In turn, a sixth form group of technicians runs a purchasing group, to buy lighting equipment, which benefits the community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. Governance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's vision has enhanced the school's provision and status, leading to good improvement.
- Governance of the school is very good. The chair and his team provide strong support, professional expertise and constructive challenge to take the school forward.
- Leadership and management are good, and very good in the sixth form.
- Very good financial management enables the school to achieve its educational aims and secure its future plans.
- The school's evaluation of its work lacks rigour and accuracy in some important respects.

Commentary

61. The governing body is impressively involved in the school's strategic planning and as a result has a very clear picture of the school's strengths and where it should go next. The chair and his fellow governors are very committed to and supportive of the school, and deploy their considerable professional expertise very effectively in their committee roles. Governors are constantly refining their practice to improve their ability to challenge the school effectively while also continuing to support its drive for improvement. They have successfully improved the opportunities for and content of daily acts of collective worship, an issue at the previous inspection.
62. The headteacher's very good leadership has provided a vision of a curriculum for all that is well on the way to being realised through obtaining both technology and arts college status for the school. Her high aspirations in deliberately seeking out quality and experience have resulted in much expertise among her staff and the creation of teams that carry out their roles with commitment and effectively overall. With the exception of religious education, other key staff, including the purposeful and focused senior management team, lead their areas of responsibility well. As a result the school maintains high standards.
63. Most subjects and much of the other work of the school, especially assessment for learning, are managed well. The school is developing a culture of self-evaluation and systems are in place to effect this. However, the school's pride in its 'tight line management' is misplaced in relation to religious education, and its judgements about achievement, teaching, learning and management in the main school are inaccurate. The school's evaluation of its work lacks rigour and accuracy in these important respects.
64. Financial management is very good. The business manager keeps close control of finances to support educational priorities and secure the school's future plans. Her expertise is enhanced by continuing professional development. 'Best value' principles are followed assiduously, resulting in improved contracts for cleaning and premises maintenance. The local educational authority audit report for 2003 was so successful that no audit is now required until 2006. Analysis of sixth form costs against income shows that it is very cost-effective.

Financial information for the year April 2004 to March 2005

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,357,753	Balance from previous year	353,946
Total expenditure	4,583,614	Balance carried forward to the next year 2005-2006	128,085
Expenditure per student	3,281		

Sixth form

Leadership and management are very good. Governance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is very clearly and successfully focused on providing opportunities that benefit students with a wide range of backgrounds and prior attainment.
- Committed and efficient management ensures that students are monitored closely and cared for and guided very well so that they can fulfil their potential.
- Though governors are very supportive of the sixth form, they still have not ensured provision for religious education as required by law, so that students have no experience of this subject.

Commentary

65. Governors are proud of the sixth form's accessibility, the way the students are looked after and how well they achieve. They continue to ensure that it is an attractive proposition to students from outside the school. However, they have still not ensured the provision of religious education, despite this being an issue at the previous inspection.
66. Very good leadership propounds the philosophy that students who show a keen interest in sixth form education are welcomed, and as a result there is a strong focus on inclusiveness and maintaining breadth of opportunity. It is the kind of leadership that is constantly looking for improvement. Leadership takes account of student views, but does not shirk difficult decisions. In consequence, the sixth form attracts parental requests for admission from 'outsiders', has successfully attracted more students into the current Year 12 than in previous years, has very high retention rates, and has students who achieve very well.
67. Management makes every effort to ensure that students benefit from the opportunities available, and that they are guided and supported very well. It operates effective systems for recording, reviewing and monitoring students' progress – the assessment for learning policy is having a significant impact on achievement. Financial management is very good: income exceeds staffing costs, with some benefit therefore to the main school.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES**Work-related learning (WRL)**

Provision for work-related learning is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students in Year 10 complete a two-week work-experience placement.
- The school has very good links with local businesses; opportunities for students to be involved in activities linked to business outside normal lessons are good.
- Standards in the vocational options are above average and achievement is very good.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Learning opportunities for WRL are not fully identified in all subjects.

Commentary

68. The vocational curriculum includes opportunities to study the applied business GCSE and to gain vocational qualifications in ICT. Standards on these courses are above average and students' achievement is very good. In September 2005, 24 students will begin to follow a curriculum with greater emphasis on vocational courses to be run in partnership with Northumberland College of Further Education.
69. Leadership and management of WRL are good. The coordinator is well supported in her work by the deputy headteacher responsible for the curriculum and the school industry liaison committee, which includes representatives from local businesses. The work-experience programme is well established and the school has a very good range of business and industry links that ensures all students in Year 10 have two weeks work experience. All placements are monitored and students complete an evaluation on returning to school. All students are able to take part in a number of events aimed at increasing their understanding of the world of work. Year 9 students enjoy an 'INPUT' day working with local engineers and the Northumberland Education Business Partnership solving technological problems and developing team-building skills. All students in Year 10 take part in the 'Be Real' game that introduces them to the fundamentals of career planning and helps them develop the necessary skills to function successfully in the world of work. Business education, design and technology, geography and ICT courses successfully use the world of work as a context for learning but other subjects have not yet revised their curriculum to do this.

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, French and German were the focus of the inspection. Latin was sampled.

Latin

70. Standards in work seen showed improvement on below average GCSE results in 2004. Year 11 students had a good awareness of the complexities of Latin construction, recognising noun and verb forms well. The work was giving them very good insights into life in the Ancient World, showing them, for example, that satirical humour is not new. Learning was good because of good teaching that encouraged collaboration, injected some fun and stretched gifted, talented and other students well. Students were able to grasp meaning in sophisticated poetry and to make word associations with current English usage; the work helped to develop their literacy skills very well.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching enables students to achieve well.
- Although achievement is satisfactory, students achieve less well in Year 9 because lessons do not always fully meet the needs of all.

Commentary

71. Students enter the school with above average standards in English. Satisfactory teaching in Year 9 and good teaching in Years 10 and 11 help them initially to maintain and then to build on these standards. In national tests for 2003, Year 9 students gained results above the national average for all schools. Results were average compared with those of similar schools. Unverified results for 2004 show that the proportions of students gaining level 5 and level 6 increased for the first time since 2000. GCSE examination results for English in 2004 were well above the national average. Results for English literature were above average.
72. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average in Year 9. This represents satisfactory achievement. By Year 9 students talk readily and express themselves clearly in appropriate language. Working in groups they listen well to each other and quickly reach conclusions through focused discussion. They read literary and non-fiction texts with good grasp of central meaning, although they have limited understanding of more complex material, such as Ernest Hemingway's short story, *The End of Something*. Written work is well organised and generally accurate, although spelling standards vary even amongst the highest attaining students. Lower attaining students in mixed ability groups find many writing tasks difficult. They produce only brief responses because they need more support for their writing.

73. In Years 10 and 11 achievement is good. Students from all ethnic backgrounds and of all capabilities achieve equally well. By Year 11, standards are well above average. Students are keen to talk about their work and express themselves confidently. Lower attaining students showed interest and good understanding in their lively discussions on fonts and language in newspaper headlines. Higher attaining students in Year 10 discussed autobiographical writing maturely, clearly expressing complex ideas in precise language. When annotating poems, students show very good understanding of literary terms and techniques. Detailed work on texts such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is penetrating and very well supported. Higher attaining students write assured notes on imagery in *Romeo and Juliet*, based upon very good understanding of Shakespearean language. Students generally write accurately and appropriately. The expression of higher attaining students is very fluent. They make good use of their skills in ICT to produce work in English.
74. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in Year 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Year 9 students make sound progress in mixed ability groups but when lesson plans do not take full account of the particular needs of the lowest and highest attaining students, they advance more slowly than others. For example, in an otherwise good lesson on how to write effective story openings, lower attaining students had no simple examples that they might follow. Even so, Year 9 students invariably work hard in lessons and enjoy English. Their programmes of lessons are currently being revised to provide a better balanced and more flexible framework to support the learning of all students. In Years 10 and 11, good teaching ensures that lessons are lively and challenging for all. A lesson on non-fiction texts for a lower attaining set of Year 11 students was excellent because the teacher had the highest expectations and did not compromise the levels of challenge offered. Careful selection of tasks and the provision of well-chosen support materials enabled every student to succeed by making very good progress. A clear focus on central steps for learning means that all students work confidently. They are very clear about where they stand in relation to GCSE grade levels and know what they must do to improve. Teachers plan lessons carefully to involve all students actively so that they learn readily. Detailed marking gives all students clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses so that they can move forward well. Students also benefit from frequent theatre trips and other additional activities.
75. Leadership and management of the department are good. Declining test results in Year 9 have steadied and GCSE results have improved. New teachers quickly become part of this improving team. Responsibilities are shared well and all teachers contribute to departmental strategy. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Assessment is now particularly strong, and reflects the thorough planning throughout the department that has led to improved GCSE results.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

76. Standards of language and literacy are above average. Students write easily and accurately for a range of purposes. Skills in reading for meaning are generally good. Students make good use of the learning resource centre to extend their reading. Most departments have very clear policies for improving students' language skills. This is having a positive impact on standards of literacy across the curriculum. Particularly good practice is evident in modern foreign languages, where students are encouraged to analyse grammatical forms, and in geography, where students write for a variety of purposes and are encouraged to read widely.

French and German

Provision in French and German is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good assessment helps to raise standards.
- Students' very positive attitudes to their studies also raise standards.
- Teaching is very good; most is very well organised and actively welcomes comment on how to improve.
- The department does not contribute to the school's arts specialist status; there is too little music, drama and verse to help students memorise their work.

Commentary

77. The well above average GCSE results of recent years are likely to be sustained, as standards of work seen in class and written work are also well above average by the end of Year 11. Close collaboration with middle schools, mainly through the common adoption of the national framework for languages teaching, ensures the continuity of students' learning. Good achievement continues to the end of Year 9. Inspection evidence matches teachers' assessments that show attainment to be above average at this stage. A one-year course on Europe and its main languages provides well for students with special educational needs and other low attainers. By the end of Year 9, higher and middle attainers can write descriptive pieces well, because of the strong emphasis teaching places on developing interesting writing on social themes; these make a very good contribution to students' personal development.
78. Girls achieve better than boys, mainly because they apply themselves better and are better at learning by heart. Nonetheless, students have very good attitudes to learning and both genders do significantly better, by just about the same amount, than their equivalents nationally. Many more girls than boys elect to continue the study of French or German in Years 10 and 11.
79. Although GCSE results in 2004 fell, they were, nonetheless, well above average. Students did better in French than in all other subjects they took and German results were equally as good as other subjects. Their very good attitudes make a positive contribution to achievement. Despite a hiccup caused by staff absence, reallocation of classes has meant that students in Years 10 and 11 enjoy very good teaching that is leading to very good learning and similar achievement that promise well above average results at the end of the courses. Higher attainers have a good eye for patterns in language. Year 11 students have very good understanding of spoken and written German and French. They know a variety of tenses, readily using the subjunctive, for example in some work of a high standard in French. In German, most students have a good accent and can express cogent opinions on ecological issues. Middle and the few lower attainers are more halting in oral work, but are well coached to say and write things, for example on home life, to basic requirements.
80. Very good teaching by well-trained, imaginative practitioners who are keen to improve practice leads to very good learning. Teaching by temporary staff in Year 9 does not match that of the rest. In the main, teaching methods stimulate interest and get the language across to students whose learning is, as a result, also very good. Consideration of how students learn best, challenge, pace and competition typify very good practice. The effective use of ICT helps learning, particularly through some

stimulating presentations and language practice. For example, two teachers working together helped to bring a lesson alive for a group of Year 9 low attainers. Generally, very good preparation led to a wide range of activities that had students working effectively in groups, in pairs and moving around the room to seek information of others: this resulted in very good learning. Teaching both creates and benefits from students' very positive attitudes to learning. All teaching in Years 10 and 11 is aimed at improving achievement and success in GCSE examinations; it does so clinically and, considering the results, successfully. However, there are inconsistencies; some teaching lacks imagination and sparkle. Not enough is done to spread good practice. A weakness is the relative absence of opportunities for students to learn through music, drama and verse to help their recall and appreciation of accuracy. Assessment is very good; it raises standards: it is ingrained. Students mark each other's work and criticise it seriously. Marking is helpful, so students know what they need to do to reach the next level of performance.

81. Good leadership has managed difficulties of staff absence well. Teamwork is good, but mutual criticism to help improve teaching even further is not carried out frequently enough, so the department finds it hard to gauge how successful innovation is. Improvements since the previous inspection are good; standards have risen; ICT plays a fuller part in learning; assessment is now very good and the department keeps a portfolio of sample work.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good so that students achieve well.
- Good leadership provides a clear vision for further improvement.
- Objectives are not used well enough as a focus for learning in lessons.
- Literacy skills are not given enough attention in teachers' planning.

Commentary

82. Results in the 2004 Year 9 national tests were well above average. This represents good achievement in relation to students' earlier learning. 2004 GCSE examination results were well above average. Students performed as well in mathematics as they did in most other subjects studied. They achieved well. In both, the proportion of students gaining the highest levels was well above average.
83. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are well above average. Achievement is good in relation to students' standards on entry to the school. Students recall their tables and handle calculators confidently. Algebraic and problem-solving skills are being developed well and data-handling skills are good. The highest attaining students understand well how to use compasses to construct loci and the lowest attaining students draw bar graphs effectively. In Year 11 standards are well above average. Standards for this group of students were above average on entry to the school in Year 8. The highest attaining students understand very well the use of trigonometry to find sides and angles and average attaining students know how to find gradients of straight lines. Teachers build well on earlier work so that students achieve well. In both Year 9 and Year 11, the highest attaining students achieve very well.

84. Teaching is good. Teachers use their very good command of the subject well to ensure that new skills and concepts are clearly explained. As a result, students make good progress with their understanding of new skills. Teachers plan well for the needs of students; tasks are suitably varied and challenging and, consequently, all students, including those who have special educational needs or who are gifted and talented, make good progress and achieve well. Questioning involves students well and provides opportunities for students to share ideas and strategies with each other. Teachers are using the new technology well to develop students' learning and provide interesting lessons. The use of starter activities as part of the mathematics strand of the government's national initiative in Years 7 to 9 (Key Stage 3 Strategy) is being implemented well. Although objectives are displayed in most lessons they are not used well enough as a focus for learning during and at the end of lessons. In addition, insufficient attention is given to supporting students' literacy skills through highlighting key words in lessons and displays. Students' work is assessed regularly and teachers intervene in students' learning in lessons to check their progress well. Homework is used well to support learning. It is marked well providing constructive comments for students about their standards and what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers manage and organise students well. As a result, students' attitudes to learning are good; they behave well, work productively on their tasks and cooperate well with each other when asked to work together. This is encouraged by the good relationships with the teachers and with each other.
85. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader provides a clear vision and direction for improvement with appropriate priorities identified to move the subject forward. The available teachers are well deployed and supported and students are organised effectively. Assessment information is used well to monitor and support students' progress. Improvement since the previous inspection is good; GCSE results are higher and access to computers has significantly improved.

Mathematics across the curriculum

86. The contribution made by subjects to developing students' numeracy skills is satisfactory. Students' competence in mathematics is above average and numeracy skills are developed well in mathematics lessons. Good contributions are being made in, for example, science, geography and ICT in developing students' use of numeracy in the work they do. However, opportunities are not always clearly identified in teachers planning to support students' numeracy skills in lessons.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which helps them plan interesting lessons to provide varied and structured learning.
- Teachers' marking is very good and gives students extensive analysis of their strengths and weaknesses but monitoring of marking does not ensure that teachers check that students follow their instructions, so errors or incomplete work are not rectified.

Commentary

87. The results of national tests for Year 9 students in 2003 and 2004 were well above the national average. Over the years, students' performance has varied little until 2004, when there was a small improvement. Over the years there has been little difference in the performance of boys and girls. Results in the GCSE double award science examinations were well above average in 2004 but slightly lower than those for 2003, especially at the highest grades A*-A. In 2003, boys did particularly well at the highest grades. In 2004 results in science for grades A*-C were above those for mathematics but below those for English. Since the previous inspection in 1999, the proportion of grades A*-C has risen a little compared to the national average.
88. In work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average, representing satisfactory achievement in relation to students' standards when they joined the school. Higher attaining students write chemical equations in symbols and calculate speed, pressure or the moment acting on a body competently. As a result, the subject makes a good contribution to developing students' numerical skills. Lower attaining students know how the voltage and current vary in series and parallel circuits. Standards are well above average by the end of Year 11. Students use a range of equations, have a good knowledge of the solar system, understand how the universe was formed and show a good knowledge of genetics. Lower attaining students use worksheets more frequently to structure their work, use a restricted range of equations but show a good knowledge of the relationships between predators and prey and the pyramid of numbers. From the beginning of Year 9 to the end of Year 11, students' achievement is good because high standards have been maintained and the proportion of the highest grades increased. Students with special educational needs make good progress because of the help and support they get from their teachers, other adults or Year 13 students who voluntarily give up some of their time. Students use the specialist vocabulary of the subject well but when their presentation is poor, teachers give little guidance on standards required or how work can be improved.
89. Teaching is satisfactory in Year 9 and learning is satisfactory as a result. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning are good. Teachers use their very good specialist knowledge to add interest to lessons, which maintains students' concentration. The very good relations between students and teachers in Years 10 and 11 mean lessons are free of tension and productive, though in Year 9 inattention and low-level disruption mean learning is not always so effective. Good lessons are brisk and well planned with a variety of activities of appropriate difficulty and consolidate students' new knowledge well. Otherwise satisfactory lessons are less demanding so progress is slower.
90. Assessment is good and students' performance and progress well documented. Teachers mark homework very well and write helpful notes on how students can improve their work. Where students have been told to complete or correct work many fail to do so and teachers have not checked their instructions are being carried out so opportunities to improve achievement are missed.
91. Leadership is good. Very high standards have been maintained and a range of productive links with outside agencies established to support learning. Students benefit from a good range of extra-curricular provision. Higher attaining students can join in activities with older ones, which provide demanding work and raise their aspirations. Management is good. The work of three separate science departments is

well coordinated and teachers and technicians are deployed to make best use of their specialist knowledge. However, the monitoring of marking is unsatisfactory.

92. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Well above average standards have been maintained, the provision and use of ICT and the provision of textbooks have improved and there is good provision of extra-curricular activities.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership promotes improvement in teaching and learning.
- A good range of courses is available to meet students' needs.
- ICT is used well to support learning across the curriculum.
- Students' skills in ICT project management are underdeveloped.
- Information on students' ICT capability is insufficient in Year 9 and leading to some inaccurate assessments.

Commentary

93. Teachers assessed students' standards at the end of Year 9 in 2004 as well above average. The proportion of students gaining at least a pass grade was very high for the GNVQ course. These were commendable results as the course was run in half of the expected time. The recommended time has now been allocated to this course with the expectation that there will be a significant increase in the higher levels of merit and distinction being attained. Students who do not follow the GNVQ course in ICT in Year 11 learn enough to get their statutory entitlement through key skills ICT lessons, GCSE lessons run after school and through ICT use in other subjects of the curriculum. Students in Year 10 receive their ICT entitlement by following a GCSE short course that was started this year for all students.
94. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are broadly average and achievement is good when students' prior attainment is considered. Students use ICT well to capture and process information, and for communication through desktop publishing and website creation. Teachers' assessments of higher attaining students' standards are too high. This is because some students cannot manage an ICT project independently. Their capability in this is restricting the expected higher attainment evidence in students' work and they also cannot explain in detail how their work meets the needs of a user.
95. By Year 11, standards are above average for students following the GNVQ course and their achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Students work confidently with a range of software. Students' project management skills and testing in relation to the user are underdeveloped. All students who do not follow the GNVQ course in Year 11 follow a key skills course and achievement for these students is satisfactory when their prior attainment is considered.
96. Teaching is good and promotes good learning. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and well-developed working relationships with students. Students respond well and concentrate for long periods of time working both independently and collaboratively as they learn how to use ICT effectively. A good level of increased

support is given in lessons to students with special educational needs. Teachers provide good opportunities in lessons for students to speak about their work and to review other students' work.

97. Leadership and management are good. The head of department is a very good role model and provides good opportunities for new teachers to see his good classroom practices. Good links have been established with middle schools to improve students' progress between Years 8 and 9 but teachers' information in Year 9 on what students can and cannot do in ICT is insufficiently detailed to fully inform their planning. Students' experience is enriched very well through well-organised extensions to courses, after-school ICT clubs run by members of the technical support team and lunchtime communication with schools in other countries. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, as the issues raised at the time of the previous inspection have been dealt with and the school has raised the number of computers available for students to above that seen nationally. There is now a good level of technical support. The head of ICT also oversees the use of ICT across the curriculum and this is good overall. Good systems have been developed to review staff competencies and inform professional development. Technology in teaching has expanded significantly: digital projectors are installed in all classrooms, teachers have laptop computers and resources are stored on the school Intranet by many subjects.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

98. The use of ICT across the curriculum is good overall. Excellent use is made of ICT in computer graphics where all aspects of the course are ICT-based and students use these resources with a high level of competence. Students demonstrate a good level of competence as they use ICT in business education for research and presentation of information, in their use of electronic resources in geography and for research in history, and students interact with the software well in their learning in French. Good competence is also shown in students' use of video recording, CDs, and word-processing for reviewing, evaluating and presenting work in performing arts studies.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are well above average and represent good achievement.
- Teaching is very good in Year 10 and 11 and provides very good learning opportunities for students.
- There is a clear literacy strategy in place that supports lower attaining students.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- Students in Year 9 are given too little opportunity to use computers in their class work.
- Coursework in Year 11 is too limited and does not include the opportunity to study physical aspects of geography.

Commentary

99. Teachers assessed students' standards at the end of year 9 in 2004 as above average. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2004 were well above average and have shown a steady improvement over the last three years with an increasing

number of students taking the subject. Girls performed slightly better than boys, especially in the higher grades, but the difference is not great. Work seen during the inspection matches these assessments and results.

100. By the end of Year 9 students reach standards that are above the national average. Their work is detailed and impressive and represents good achievement. They have acquired good map skills and their written work shows a good understanding of how physical and human processes shape the landscape; for example students write a walkers' guide to the Dorset coastline using their map-reading skills and highlight coastal erosion features. Higher attaining students make good use of case studies to illustrate how towns and cities have a sphere of influence and apply this to a detailed study of their own town. Lower achieving students are given good support, tasks are adapted and they achieve well. However, students in Year 9 are given little opportunity to use computers in their class work.
101. By Year 11, standards are well above average and this represents very good achievement in relation to students' standards at the start of the course. Students write well and link cause and effect in some detail. They use hypothesis testing to good effect, for example to explain the pattern of urban zones found in Leicester. Higher attaining students use extended writing to argue the case for the preservation of tropical rain forests. Lower attaining students produce work at a standard above that normally expected and their answers, though brief, are correct. Coursework is done to a very high standard by all students and is based on urban studies. However, this is too limited and does not include the opportunity to study physical aspects of geography, such as coastal or river features.
102. Teaching and learning are good in Year 9 and very good in Year 10 and 11. Students benefit from a specialist team of teachers who are thoroughly prepared, make very good use of resources and have very good subject knowledge. This is most evident in lessons in Years 10 and 11 where teaching is based on an exciting and stimulating approach that makes students think. Literacy skills in students are promoted through a clear literacy strategy that stresses key words, encourages the use of extended writing and supports lower attaining students by providing differentiated worksheets. Teaching assistants are well deployed and make a significant contribution by sometimes withdrawing groups of students for intensive support. Considerable thought has gone into the scheme of work to produce lessons that are interesting and relevant to students. For example, a lesson on river features asked students to produce an animated cartoon showing how oxbow lakes, waterfalls and deltas are formed. Teaching is helped by the fact that students want to learn and by behaviour that is very good.
103. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department has a clear vision of how geography contributes to the whole-school curriculum and how further improvements can be made in provision. He builds on the many strengths of his team through collaborative planning and the sharing of ideas and good practice. Evaluation is used to find out what works best, for example the effectiveness of ICT in raising achievement in Year 10. Assessment arrangements are good and provide a meaningful experience for students. Clear guidelines are given by teachers on how students can improve and what they need to do to gain a higher level or grade.
104. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Students now have an impressive range of geographical skills and are not passive learners. Teaching is very

good in Year 10 and 11. Expectations of students are high, reflected in the targets set. Management and organisation are now strong features of the department.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching is leading to very good achievement in Year 11.
- Students' understanding is raised because teachers use methods that involve them in the analysis of the information they acquire.
- Revision classes before examinations contribute to the achievement of students who attend.
- Marking is regular and informative, but there are too few opportunities to assess students' progress in Year 9.

Commentary

105. GCSE results in 2004 were average overall. Results were below those of previous years. Girls achieved much higher grades than the boys, who took less advantage of the revision lessons offered. The weak attendance of a minority of boys affected their grades adversely.
106. Standards in Year 9 are above average and achievement is good. Students have a good understanding of life in the trenches, and identify the shortcomings of the leadership in the First World War. They can present two views of an event well and most recognise that a range of factors lead to it. When forming judgements, higher attaining students display greater reasoning than might be expected, for example when comparing the strengths of the participating countries. Lower attaining students present relevant information well, but do not always demonstrate that they have considered their conclusions. Students have a balanced view of the life in the community of the 'Plains Indian' and use sources confidently to identify opinions. The use of role-play has enabled them to gain good understanding of the different positions within the community.
107. Standards in Year 11 are well above average and achievement is very good in relation to students' standards at the start of the course. Students are now more actively involved in the analysis of their work. Their understanding of the events and causes of the American prosperity and depression of the 1920s is very well developed. They can identify the effects on different sections of the population clearly. They provide good comparisons of these effects and draw conclusions from them. The extended writing of higher attaining students is very well developed and they present detailed arguments. They provide clear reasoned judgements that are well supported with evidence. The arguments of lower attaining students include relevant detail, but demonstrate less evidence of reasoned judgement. Students' knowledge and understanding of the impact of the American economy on Germany and its effect on the rise of Hitler is very good.
108. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Year 9. It is very good in Years 10 and 11 because the regular monitoring of progress towards students' target grades is enabling teachers to identify areas for development. Students are involved in their own assessment; their greater understanding of standards and of the criteria for success is

enabling them to achieve well. Teachers use methods that engage students and involve them in the analysis of the information they acquire. This process supports their interest and recall and promotes deeper understanding. Teaching is best where reflection and evaluation are used to consolidate learning and to enable students to recognise their achievement. Lessons are less successful where there is not enough concern for the needs of individuals in classes with a wide range of attainment and students lose interest in tasks that do not challenge them enough. Marking is regular and informative, but there are too few opportunities to assess students' progress in Year 9. Assessment tasks in Year 9 do not focus on specific key skills in history so they do not identify areas for development. Teachers give good support for the development of literacy, and the support for students' coursework in Year 11 is encouraging reading and research.

109. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There are high aspirations and the effective team of teachers is well supported. Teachers are encouraged to contribute their strengths to the work of the department and the focus on teaching and learning styles is raising the achievement of all students. The revision lessons prior to examinations help to raise the achievement of the students in Year 11 who attend. Schemes of work are being reviewed, but at present do not include detail about cross-curricular issues and clear assessment opportunities in order to ensure consistency across the department. Since the previous inspection, standards and achievement have risen and links with the middle schools have been developed. Improvement has been good.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject.
- Relationships are positive, encouraging a good response to teaching and encouraging learning.
- There is no plan or vision as to how to move the department forward.

Commentary

110. No students were entered for GCSE in 2004.

111. Standards are average in Years 9 and 11. Achievement is satisfactory. Students are able to articulate their opinions about miracles and prejudice, and empathise with the victims of discrimination. In Year 11, students have secure knowledge and understanding of moral issues. They are able to consider information objectively and higher attainers can make balanced judgements about ethical situations.

112. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers use their good knowledge of their subject to explain religious concepts clearly. Lessons show planning and in most cases objectives are shared, enabling a structure to the lessons which focuses students' concentration. Nevertheless, lessons in Year 9 are not consistently planned to provide tasks matched to individual needs. Progress is hampered because pace and challenge are not always adequate to keep all students working hard. Relationships between staff and students are respectful and classroom management is good, setting the scene for learning. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are

satisfactory. Students make progress in expressing their thoughts and are motivated by the topics.

113. Management is satisfactory. Staff work together to discuss issues but there is insufficient sharing of good practice to help raise standards. Leadership of the department is unsatisfactory because there is a lack of vision and no sense of direction. The department needs to move forward but there is insufficient planning to develop the department. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Although standards are much the same in Year 9, they have improved in Year 11. The time allocated to the subject has been increased.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good and promotes good learning.
- Students behave well, are keen and interested and have very good attitudes to their work.
- Assessment of standards at the end of Year 9 is inaccurate but excellent assessment of students' work in food technology contributes to the very high standards in GCSE examinations.

Commentary

114. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades was above average. Results in food technology were very high with almost a third of those entered gaining grades A* or A. For many students their results in design and technology were below those they gained in other subjects. Results in systems and control were below average.
115. When students arrive at the school their experience of design and technology varies widely. Their capability is broadly average. Teachers' assessments indicate standards are very high by the end of Year 9. However, the methods of assessment are not reliable and these assessments are too high. During the inspection, the standard of work in Year 9 was average. Achievement in Year 9 is good because students develop their ability to design and make products using a range of materials and techniques creating a sound foundation for their GCSE courses. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average and achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Demanding project work shows good understanding of the design process and is recorded in very well presented folders. Students take care to ensure that their practical work is of a high quality and many devote considerable extra time to completing their work. They use ICT confidently and are able to use specialist software and hardware creatively. One student created a unique face for a clock she was designing and was able to manufacture it to a high standard by using a computer-controlled milling machine.
116. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge and high expectations to engage students' enthusiasm. They plan and prepare lessons well. Effective classroom management is based on firm control and very good

relationships. The good range of practical learning activities ensures that all students are actively involved in their learning. Lessons are sharply focused and the objectives are shared explicitly with students. Key learning points are systematically reinforced and new knowledge and skills are introduced progressively in order to constantly challenge and extend students of all capabilities. Students' work is assessed well to let them know how well they are doing. Teachers provide encouraging, positive and motivating comments together with realistic grades and practical suggestions about how to improve. Very good teaching and excellent assessment in food technology underpin the very high standards achieved. Teachers support students with special educational needs well. When learning support assistants are present, they brief them well and provide additional or alternative learning materials for students' use. When students have problems with literacy skills, teachers provide writing frames to help them cope with their written work in project folders and this contributes to their achievement.

117. There are separate subject leaders for design and technology and food technology. Both provide very good leadership. They have high expectations in terms of standards and have a clear view of how they wish their subject to develop. They have created teams of teachers who are committed to raising standards. Management is good. Strategies for improvement are well planned, implemented and monitored. The evaluation of the department's work is based on regular monitoring and analysis of assessment data at the level of teaching groups and of individual progress towards target grades. Leadership is innovative and the current strategy to improve teaching is well understood by all teachers. The inaccuracy of assessment at the end of Year 9 is a weakness in management.
118. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching have been tackled. The environment and the level of ICT provision have improved. Students have good access to specialist hardware and software within the teaching areas.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved in Years 10 and 11 as a result of very good teaching.
- Strong leadership has developed a department in which students of all abilities learn very well.
- The creative use of ICT supports learning very well and as a result students achieve very well in graphics.
- Cultural visits and community links are excellent and support learning very well.
- Higher attaining students are given too few opportunities for independence and choice in some classes.

Commentary

119. Teachers' assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 show them to be above average. GCSE results in 2004 were well above average. Results have improved since the previous inspection and show an upward trend.

120. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are above average. Achievement is good in relation to students' varying standards and experience when they enter the school. Good gains are made in Year 9 as a result of effective teaching that focuses on technical skills and the direct influence of prominent and visiting artists. Students have access to a wide variety of media and teaching processes. Good demonstrations and the application of painting techniques lead to rapid gains in students' knowledge and understanding. All students make good progress, including those with special educational needs. This is because there are many opportunities to improve their art at lunchtimes and after school. Students' ability to use appropriate language and to talk about art is less well developed. They are also given too few chances in class for discussion or debate at an advanced level. This can lead to missed learning opportunities for higher attaining students, including the gifted and talented.
121. By Year 11, standards are well above average and achievement is very good in relation to students' standards at the start of the course. Teachers revisit skills and introduce new ones at every opportunity. All students have very focused approaches to research. Students' observational drawing is very good. Their line drawing is skilful as is their understanding of tone and texture. All students make very good progress as a result of these skills which form the basis of their coursework development. Less attention is given to preparation and planning which would allow them to focus more clearly on their final pieces. This is not the case in graphics where planning and development are strong. This allows students to evaluate their work regularly through shared assessment with their teacher. Because of this, they are able to work independently whilst improving their ICT skills.
122. Teaching and learning are good in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 because teachers use a wider variety of methods and there is greater concentration on technical skills. Teachers plan interesting and engaging lessons and provide good demonstrations. As a result, students understand what is expected of them and learn quickly. Lessons have a purposeful atmosphere and students enjoy their lessons. They behave responsibly and maturely and take responsibility readily when handling equipment and materials. Although relationships are very positive overall, there can be some over-direction by the teacher in some classes. This can lead to missed opportunities for higher attaining students to develop and explore their own ideas or develop their own projects. There are, however, many ways in which students can become involved in school and community art. This gives all students the chance to create and plan larger works of art and work cooperatively with others outside of the classroom.
123. The head of department provides very good leadership. She has clear vision and is committed to raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning and through improving the curriculum. Schemes of work have been revised and a wealth of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities for students have been established within a very short space of time. Standards are higher. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

Music

Provision for music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning lead to very good achievement overall.
- Good use of ICT is a strong feature in improving standards and achievement.
- Very good leadership fosters valuable music activity beyond lessons.

Commentary

124. Teachers' assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were well above average. The standard of work seen in Year 9 during the inspection matches those assessments. Achievement is very good overall, helped in Year 9 by the strong links with middle schools. Most students work imaginatively and skilfully when composing in groups. Performances to their peers, including solo singing, show increasing confidence. GCSE results for the last three years were well above average. The wide range of instrumental learning and the use of ICT are important factors contributing to high standards. Compositions have complex scoring; most are well structured in a variety of styles. Standards of performance are high – very high for some. Students are encouraged to do their best by the regular monitoring of progress and setting of new targets with their teachers. Most have a very good understanding of what is required of them to progress. Most students in Year 11 have developed good study habits and show positive attitudes to learning. Participation in the department's many performing groups is a boost to achievement in music and to self-confidence. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as others because teachers are aware of their needs, modify tasks where necessary and give help to individuals.
125. Teaching and learning are very good. Preparation for lessons is exemplary so that time is used well for learning. Use of a variety of resources makes teaching more effective. Teachers engage students very well; good relationships contribute to a relaxed yet hard-working atmosphere. Assessment is continuous and systematic, using National Curriculum levels and GCSE criteria so that students know their standards and how to improve. Enthusiastic teaching and learning in lessons and voluntary activities lead to increasing numbers of students choosing music in the next stage – GCSE or sixth form courses. Very good subject knowledge and skill are used to good effect for learning; teachers are very good role models for aspiring musicians.
126. Leadership and management are very good. Appropriate priorities for development have been identified. Very good liaison with middle schools has a positive effect on achievement. Very good fostering and direction of extra-curricular activity benefits all students and maintains a high profile for music in school and the community. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Limitations noted then have been improved and standards are higher. Arts specialist status has led to closer liaison between music and other departments.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department has developed a very good team spirit where expertise is used well and shared.
- Good use is made of students' self-evaluation which helps them develop their skills.
- Activities are designed to meet the needs of all students.
- Extra-curricular provision is excellent providing opportunities for all students, including those participating at the highest level.
- Students bring very good attitudes to their work as a result of very good relationships.
- Opportunities to support aspects of the whole-school curriculum are not always taken so that opportunities are missed to contribute to cultural development and numeracy and literacy.
- There is insufficient time available to meet the full range of activities.
- The facilities are in need of refurbishment; some are unable to be used.

Commentary

127. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are average. There are no significant differences in standards between boys and girls. In gymnastics girls are able to demonstrate a range of movements demonstrating travel and balance; however, when these are combined in a routine, control and precision are inconsistent. In basketball boys effectively translate skills from other team games to create good tactical use of space but individual skills are still underdeveloped. By the end of Year 9, skills and routines are established creating the foundations for further development and this represents satisfactory achievement. In Year 11, standards are above average with students demonstrating consistent, fluent use of skills across a range of activities. For example in football, boys show good ball control skills. In game situations, more skilled players make sure that all students are involved as team members. In basketball, girls organise their own warm-up and practices and adjust their previous knowledge and skill in netball to quickly develop their ability to use a set shot in a game situation. This represents good achievement. The theory of training for fitness and the skills of observation for improvement are emphasised. Students are regularly asked to evaluate their own level of understanding and performance. Students work cooperatively and attitudes are very good.
128. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Year 9. The higher quality in Years 10 and 11 is due to better planning, effective use of time, tasks carefully adjusted to meet the needs of all students and the way teachers build upon the good relationships developed with students during Year 9. There is a sense of urgency in lessons and little time is wasted. This leads to good learning. The same applies to the GCSE course, which is in its first year, where teaching and learning are very good. Although potential links between activities and the school's wider curricular aims are acknowledged, these have not been systematically identified in planning and as a result opportunities to support the use of number, literacy and cultural opportunities are not always taken.
129. Leadership is good. A clear sense of direction has been established and there is very strong support from within the team. Management is good; an effective team has been formed whose individual strengths are deployed well. New courses have been developed and are supported by detailed records and appropriate use of data.
130. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good overall. The Community Sports Leader course and GCSE have been introduced. The timetable rotation difficulty has been resolved and teaching strategies are varied and make good use of

students' self-evaluation. Nevertheless, facilities are in poor condition and cleaning remains a difficulty.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies was sampled.

Business studies

131. Two Year 10 GCSE lessons were sampled. Teaching and learning were very good in both. In one lesson an 'express' group of high attainers learned about different methods of communication within a business. Lots of active learning at a fast pace was used appropriately. Learning new terminology was very productive and linked very well to the real business world. Standards were well above average. Self-assessment was very well used as a check on understanding. In another lesson ICT was used very effectively to consolidate students' previous learning about break-even analysis. The combination of high quality visual examples and challenging exercises worked very well. Assessment was very thorough with a check made on the accuracy of each student's work. Standards were above average.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The focus of the inspection was on citizenship. PSHE was sampled. The effectiveness of the school's good provision for students' personal development is to be seen in overall very good attitudes and behaviour. The well-organised PSHE, learning to learn and citizenship programmes are well taught and fit together well to meet all statutory requirements for careers education and guidance, sex education and drugs awareness.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and represent good achievement.
- The subject provides opportunities for students of all abilities to become active citizens.
- Management and leadership of the subject are very good and there is an exceptionally clear vision of how to link the contributions made by other curriculum subjects.

Commentary

132. The subject is not taken to examination level but standards in Year 9 and 11 are above average and represent good achievement. Boys and girls perform equally well and the subject provides opportunities for students of all abilities to become active citizens. By the end of Year 9, all students have completed a module of work on citizenship within the PSE/citizenship course that has allowed them to compile their own portfolio containing a summary of their present links with society. In their drama lessons, all students are given the opportunity to explore issues about the rights of the individual in society and, as a result, their written work shows an understanding of the negative impact of crime, truancy and bullying on those involved.

133. By the end of Year 11, all students have been given the opportunity to take part in the 'Get Active' project, an example of practical citizenship that enables groups of students to plan and implement a community project.
134. Teaching and learning are good. The course is taught by a team of staff who, although they are not all expert in the subject, have expertise in related subjects and are committed to the concept of active citizenship. Considerable thought has gone into the scheme of work to produce lessons that are relevant and interesting to the students – evident in the interest students take in compiling their citizenship portfolios in Year 9 and the enthusiasm to complete their chosen project in Year 11. Teaching is helped by good behaviour and a positive attitude to the subject. Indeed, this paves the way for students' participation in the extensive opportunities provided by the school for active citizenship: the school council, the school radio station, peer counsellors, local democracy week and participation in several national conferences.
135. The subject is very well led and managed. The teacher responsible has an exceptionally clear vision of how the many strands of citizenship and the contributions to be made by other subjects can be closely linked to provide an exciting and relevant experience for students. There is also a very clear belief in the contribution that the teaching of citizenship can make to students' all-round development. Teachers' and peer assessments are used effectively to show acquisition of skills and knowledge and students' planners contribute to the tracking of their participation in citizenship-related activities.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 12 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2004 (comparisons are with national results for all students).

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	18	72.2	78.3	22.2	21.6	28.3	28.5
Biology	26	53.8	63.5	19.2	10.4	19.6	19.8
Chemistry	25	56.0	70.3	8.0	13.2	16.4	23.0
Classical studies	6	83.3	89.1	33.3	36.0	36.7	36.5
Economics	4	75.0	71.6	0.0	18.6	20.0	25.8
English	18	83.3	85.3	11.1	16.1	25.0	29.0
English literature	20	85.0	86.2	15.0	17.4	33.0	29.7
French	8	87.5	79.8	50.0	19.4	37.5	28.2
Design and technology	5	100.0	72.6	20.0	13.9	36.0	24.3
General studies	159	83.6	73.6	17.6	16.9	29.9	25.5
Geography	9	55.6	75.5	22.2	20.4	20.0	27.0
German	5	100.0	81.6	80.0	18.8	48.0	28.8
History	21	81.0	82.2	19.0	20.8	28.1	29.2
Information technology	15	66.7	66.6	6.7	8.8	20.0	20.6
Mathematics	13	46.2	59.9	15.4	14.1	14.6	20.5
Music	3	100.0	79.8	33.3	16.9	36.7	27.5
Other languages	1	100.0	82.5	0.0	47.7	40.0	37.8
Other sciences	20	70.0	67.4	20.0	14.8	26.0	22.8
Other social studies	5	40.0	67.8	0.0	15.1	12.0	23.2
Physics	17	70.0	66.4	29.4	14.8	27.1	22.4
Religious studies	7	42.9	82.2	0.0	26.1	12.9	31.2
Sociology	11	81.8	72.1	27.3	19.6	28.2	25.9
Sports/PE studies	5	80.0	72.2	20.0	11.8	30.0	22.8

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	37	100.0	98.3	67.6	50.2	97.3	87.1
Biology	51	100.0	96.6	45.1	40.0	82.4	79.3
Chemistry	36	97.2	97.7	58.3	50.0	90.0	85.7
Classical studies	16	100.0	99.6	75.0	58.1	98.8	92.8
Communication studies	11	100.0	99.2	54.5	40.4	89.1	83.5
Economics	16	100.0	98.8	18.8	54.3	76.3	89.8
English	30	100.0	99.2	53.3	36.4	91.3	81.1
English literature	37	100.0	99.4	56.8	44.9	93.0	85.5
French	8	100.0	99.0	62.5	53.1	100.0	88.9
Design and technology	8	100.0	97.8	50.0	35.0	87.5	77.9
General studies	59	98.3	94.9	40.7	30.5	83.1	72.9
Geography	26	100.0	98.8	53.8	46.4	94.6	85.2
German	12	100.0	98.6	58.3	49.6	91.7	86.3
History	46	100.0	99.0	54.3	45.6	89.6	85.1
Information technology	16	100.0	96.3	12.5	25.7	70.0	71.1
Mathematics	38	92.1	96.8	57.9	56.6	85.8	89.5
Music	8	100.0	79.5	62.5	37.1	100.0	79.5
Other sciences	64	100.0	97.4	70.3	44.2	99.7	82.5
Other social studies	17	100.0	97.4	41.2	42.5	82.4	81.6
Physics	36	100.0	96.7	50.0	45.3	84.4	82.6
Religious studies	2	100.0	99.1	50.0	49.5	90.0	87.4
Sociology	10	100.0	98.5	60.0	45.3	92.0	84.6
Sports/PE studies	11	100.0	97.8	36.4	30.9	76.4	75.4
Business	23	97.8	91.6	48.9	24.1	83.1	67.9
Health and social care	3	80.0	93.5	40.0	24.9	72.0	70.0

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus in this inspection was on English literature and French.

A lesson in **English language** was sampled. Teaching was very good. Students made very good progress in analysing slang as an aspect of their examination of language change. Work seen was at above average levels. GCE A-level examination results for this subject in 2003 and 2004 were well above the national average. Lessons in **German** were also sampled. A Year 13 lesson enhanced students' cultural awareness very well. Teaching was good – the lesson was planned well with a clear purpose. Students achieved very well because of their clear understanding of examination requirements and very good attitudes. A Year 12 lesson was taught satisfactorily but opportunities were missed to develop students' oral skills and encourage note-making.

English literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and positive attitudes ensure that students achieve well.
- A-level results are well above the national average.
- Higher attaining students achieve particularly well because they respond positively to lessons that are consistently challenging.
- Good leadership and management have helped to raise standards of work since the previous inspection.

Commentary

136. GCE A-level examination results in 2004 were well above the national average. The proportion of students attaining A or B grades was also well above the national average. Higher attaining students achieved very well to gain these grades. Others did not so consistently achieve the grades expected of them, although results overall were well above the national average.
137. Current Year 13 students' attainment is well above average and in line with examination results for 2004. Students have very good knowledge of the texts studied. They therefore write about them with confidence and in detail, showing very good understanding of writers' intentions. Essays are carefully constructed and very well argued, as seen in the impressive work on Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* that shows strong engagement with the social and political issues underlying the novel.
138. Achievement is good. All students show that they make good progress in developing their essay writing skills during the course. Notes are detailed and generally well ordered for effective revision. They are keen to succeed and are very ready to revise and improve first drafts. These positive attitudes contribute significantly to good achievement.
139. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers involve students actively so that they are always challenged and fully engaged. As a result higher attaining students in particular enjoy lessons and learn rapidly. In a good lesson on Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Year 12 students analysed the character of Jim, working mainly in small

groups. The teacher's expectations were high and each group of students was made responsible for reporting back to others on their own section of the play. The work had a clear direction and was later to be followed by a written outcome. As a result learning was focused and students generally made good progress. However, there were no guidelines for note-making to help lower attaining students achieve their best. Marking is detailed and provides very good support for improvement. All students are clear about where they stand in relation to national standards. They know what they must do to achieve higher grades and they work hard towards these goals.

140. Leadership and management are good. The course is well organised on the basis of shared responsibility. Students are very clear about all examination requirements and they know precisely what they must do to succeed. Relationships between staff and students are very good. Students speak highly of the course and enjoy lessons. English literature is a popular subject choice and very few students fail to complete the course. Good improvement since the previous inspection is evident from the higher examination results.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads to well above average standards.
- The courses contribute very well to students' personal development.
- Students take their studies seriously; they work hard and want to do well.
- Very good assessment and self-criticism raise standards.

Commentary

141. GCE AS and A-level courses recruit well compared with national patterns; retention rates are very good. Courses attract many more girls than boys. Examination results at both levels have been well above average over the recent past, with never less than half of the candidates obtaining higher, A/B, grades. Standards in the current Year 13 suggest a continuation of the trend this year and the results of the following year should be similar or better.
142. In Year 13, oral competence is above average. Achievement is very good. Students have an impressive vocabulary upon which they draw readily. They are quite fluent in the difficult job of reporting issues retrieved from newspaper articles to their peers; they, in turn, are very ready to criticise each other's performances and to make suggestions for improvement. Students demonstrate a strong will to do well: the key skill of working together is very well developed, as is the use of ICT, especially in research of the Internet. Scrutiny shows that writing standards are above average. There is a very good control of language and an ability to make persuasive argument. The highest attainers use a wide, relevant vocabulary and range of structures; accuracy is good.
143. Year 12 students also collaborate purposefully. Their audio skills are above average and they are able to make cogent arguments, for example about national stereotypes, taking positive and negative stances in good debate. Most of them have a very good active vocabulary. Written work shows a full range of attainment. Students write at a good length. The higher attainers write accurately and their work shows they conduct

thorough research and use its findings well, for example on adolescents' reading and viewing habits. Middle attainers lack the same depth of argument and control of language, working, however, at average standards.

144. The very good quality of teaching puts a lot of responsibility on the students to find out for themselves, but also makes sure they have the keys to success, for example by compiling their own phrase books. Teaching works hard on developing fluency and note-making techniques. It uses taped recordings and video presentations well to extend understanding. Students' critical analysis of each other's work is a strong feature of very good assessment. The correction of written work provides very helpful information on standards and on ways to improve. Just occasionally, important errors are not drawn to students' attention and this mars the reader's flow.
145. Sixth form courses teach students a lot about France in the world, social systems and habits. The courses are well led and managed; arrangements to cover staff absence are very effective. French has continued its strong performance since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

146. Standards of literacy in the sixth form are above average so that students are able to cope successfully with the demands of their courses. Students are generally well supported in the development of their language and literacy skills, particularly so in, for example, modern languages, physical education, performance studies, sociology and classical civilisation.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive and their very positive attitudes.
- Good leadership and management ensure that teachers' expertise is used well and students' progress is checked and supported very well.
- Teachers are not able to support students' learning more effectively because of the way in which teaching groups are organised.

Commentary

147. In 2004, GCE A-level examination results were average. This represents satisfactory achievement in relation to students' attainment at the start of the course. AS-level results were well above average. Sixty-seven students were entered, some beginning the course with well below expected standards for AS-level mathematics. Most students achieved well.
148. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 13 are above average. AS-level results for students continuing the course are above average. Students understand well different methods of using calculus to differentiate and integrate a range of trigonometric functions. Students have made good progress since the start of their courses. This good progress is the result of teachers' concentration on ensuring that

students' basic skills, in particularly algebraic skills, are constantly reinforced during each stage of their work.

149. Teaching is good. It promotes good learning and leads to good achievement in relation to students' standards at the start of their courses and their capabilities. Teachers' excellent command of their subject enables them to explain new skills and difficult concepts clearly so that students know how to apply them to a range of questions. Questioning of students is generally good but does not always target well enough the weaker students in the class. Lessons are very well planned to provide a variety of suitably challenging tasks which develop students' learning well and result in students achieving well. Good day-to-day assessment of students' work supports students' learning well ensuring that students know how well they are doing in relation to examination criteria. Relationships are very good and, as a result, students show very positive attitudes to their work; they make considerable efforts to understand the work they are doing and teachers provide good support and guidance so that students overcome their difficulties and achieve well.
150. Leadership and management are good. A clear direction is provided for the department's work and its development and there is a strong commitment by all teachers to get the very best from all students. Teachers are deployed well to ensure that their specialist knowledge is used to best advantage and good assessment procedures and planning ensure that students' progress is checked and supported well. Mathematics is a popular subject with students and numbers in Year 12 continue to rise. Some students start the courses with less than the recommended level of attainment in GCSE mathematics and the organisation of students into teaching groups results in a very wide range of attainment in classes. As a result, teachers have to work extremely hard to ensure that students' progress and achievement are adequately supported. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good: even though the number of students following an A-level course has significantly increased, above average standards have been maintained.

Mathematics across the curriculum

151. Students' use of mathematics and their level of numeracy skills are above average. As a result, they are able to tackle the mathematical demands of their different subjects and courses successfully. For example, in physics and chemistry students cope well with numerical data and use formulae confidently, in business studies they analyse financial information well and in geography they demonstrate very good graphical skills.

SCIENCE

The focus in this inspection was on chemistry and physics.

Lessons were sampled in **biology**. In a Year 13 lesson teaching and learning were good. Students achieved well as a result of the variety of activities used to establish the difference between primary and secondary infections and the body's response. Very positive attitudes contributed to the good achievement. In a Year 12 lesson students were achieving satisfactorily as they extended their knowledge and understanding of the action of the human heart. Teaching showed expert subject knowledge. Students' attitudes to learning were very good.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement.
- Standards are above average.
- Students are well motivated which leads to very good working relationships during lessons.
- Resources have not caught up with increasing group sizes so that students often have to share equipment during practical sessions or have insufficient ICT facilities.

Commentary

152. A-level results in 2004 were above average. These results were an improvement on those of 2003 when all students obtained at least a pass grade but fewer obtained the higher grades. The AS-level results for 2004 were below average and not as high as 2003 when they were above average.
153. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are above average. Students have a good understanding of the transition elements and their compounds. Some of these students conducted a lesson to teach this topic to their peers. Year 12 students are able to name and draw organic structures and are building well on work covered at GCSE level. Higher attaining students cope well with the demands of the course, but lower attainers find difficulty with the synoptic question paper and need more help. The department has begun to address this problem through the production of new support material which is already proving to be successful. Students in both years display literacy and numeracy skills that enable them to cope well with the demands of the course and they show competence in the practical aspect of the subject.
154. The overall achievement of students is good in relation to their standards at the start of the sixth form because of the good teaching and the very positive attitudes of the students to their learning.
155. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject which enables them to clearly explain difficult concepts to students to help their learning and understanding. Lessons are well organised and have a brisk pace which maintains the interest of the students who rise to the challenges presented to them. The very good relationships in lessons mean that students feel able to ask for help if they need to and they are encouraged to help each other and share ideas. Independent learning skills are fostered through project work and the use of individual study booklets. Marking and assessment of students' work are thorough and provide clear guidelines on areas for improvement. Students receive a comprehensive breakdown of their achievements through individual assessment sheets.
156. Leadership and management of the department are good and there is a clear focus on improvement. Teachers are continually searching for ways to improve achievement and further motivate the students. External links are very good and students have the opportunity to carry out analytical work in local industry, the results of which contribute towards their coursework. There are also links with a local university which provides a visiting speaker. Accommodation is satisfactory and the department receives good technical support. Students experience a variety of practical work but insufficient resources for the increasing group sizes sometimes limit this. The use of data-logging

equipment by students is also restricted due to a lack of resources. Improvement since the last inspection has been good; results are improving, links with external agencies have improved and the subject is increasing in popularity.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good assessment and support help all students to make good progress.
- Very good relationships and attitudes make lessons productive.
- Very good extra-curricular activities raise students' aspirations and widen their knowledge of physics.
- Some lessons take place in small, unattractive rooms that restrict the variety of methods and range of activities that teachers can employ.

Commentary

157. In 2004 A-level results were above average and similar to those in 2003. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades A/B was above the national average in both years and students' results in physics were significantly better than their results in their other subjects. Results at AS-level over the years have been above average. The proportion of girls studying physics is above average and their results are similar to those of boys.
158. The standard of students' work seen during the inspection is above average. Achievement is good in relation to students' standards at the start of the course. In Year 13, students use a very wide range of scientific formulae. They have a good knowledge of modern physics theories and the structure of nuclear particles. They can solve problems in optics by calculation or by scale drawing and draw and interpret straight-line and curved graphs to above average standards. Students in Year 12 understand the conservation laws governing particle interactions and use simple graphical methods to account for experimental error in practical work.
159. Overall teaching is good. The best lessons are brisk and well planned. Teachers are very well qualified and their expert subject knowledge is presented enthusiastically. Teachers use questions well to allow students to recall previous knowledge, apply it to new situations and draw logical conclusions. Students learn well as a result and well-planned visits and visiting speakers give added depth and significance to their studies. Their very good attitudes and relationships with their teachers play a significant part in making lessons effective. As a result of the good teaching, high expectations and very good attitudes, students' achievement is good. Some lessons take place in rather cramped conditions thus restricting the variety of methods and range of activities that teachers can employ.
160. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear vision of what the department wishes to achieve. Students have a wider range of prior attainment at GCSE than is usual and a high level of support is available for all. Students' progress is well assessed and documented and the work of teachers in the department is monitored and organised effectively. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. High standards have been maintained, there is increased provision and use of ICT equipment, and assessment has improved.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology was not a focus subject for this inspection but a Year 13 lesson was sampled. Very good teaching promoted very good learning about human computer interface efficiency and effectiveness issues. Students enjoyed the work, had very positive attitudes and behaviour in this lesson and achieved very well. Very good links were made by the teacher to the examination requirements of the course.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

161. The head of ICT also oversees the use of ICT across the curriculum and this is good overall. Good systems have been developed to review staff competencies and inform professional development. Technology in teaching has expanded significantly: digital projectors are installed in all classrooms, teachers have laptop computers and resources are stored on the school Intranet by many subjects. Excellent use is made in computer graphics where all aspects of the course are ICT-based. Good use was seen in business education for research and presentation of information, Electronic resources are used well in geography, for research in history, and students interact with the software in their learning in French. Good use of video-recording, CDs, and word-processing for reviewing, evaluating and presenting work was also seen in performing arts. Satisfactory use of ICT was seen in other subjects. Students can access ICT for independent study in the learning resources centre, in classrooms around the school and by borrowing laptop computers.

HUMANITIES

The focus in this inspection was on government and politics, history and psychology.

Lessons in **classical civilisation**, **geography**, **religious studies** and **sociology** were also sampled. Two lessons in classical civilisation were seen in which teaching was very good and students were making very good gains in understanding of the place of women in ancient Athens and Rome and of Greek tragedy. Assessment for learning principles played a very strong part in the learning. An excellent Year 12 lesson in geography characterised by the teacher's expert subject knowledge combined with a very effective range of activities enabled students to learn much about how land use is decided in urban areas. Their achievement was excellent as a result. In the two lessons seen in religious studies, Year 13 students were making satisfactory progress in understanding the nature of religious experience and Year 12 students made good progress in understanding the notion of causality in cosmological argument. A very good sociology lesson for Year 13 students involved all students actively in discussion of the secularisation of society. Learning was very effectively linked to the ideas of established theorists.

Government and politics

Provision in government and politics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject have a very positive impact on students' attitudes and on their learning.
- Resources are used very well so that topical issues are an integral part of learning.
- Teaching methods are very effective in developing skills in analysis and evaluation, and in matching the needs of the wide range of students who choose to study the subject, all of whom have not studied it previously.
- The range of 'real world' contacts is limited and this limits opportunities to enrich learning.
- Strategies to further improve quality are not clearly identified because of the lack of a subject-specific focus in development planning.

Commentary

162. A-level results were above average in 2004 and also in 2003. Over two thirds of current Year 13 students gained a grade A or B in AS examinations in 2004.
163. By the end of Year 13 standards are well above average with no significant differences between boys and girls. Standards are now higher because of the impact of very effective developments in teaching, curriculum and assessment on the needs of students with a wide range of prior attainment, for example in acquiring key examination skills. As a result of these developments, and given also that the subject is new to all students starting the course in Year 12, achievement is very good. By the end of Year 13 skills in analysis and evaluation develop very well. In the great majority of cases writing is in an appropriate formal academic style. Topical issues are integrated very well into writing and discussion. Students' research is very thorough. They identify changes over time in comparing and contrasting features of government and politics in different countries. They use political vocabulary very well and are confident in dealing with abstract ideas. In writing and discussion they show a very good awareness of the importance of historical context. Some Year 12 students show weaknesses in structuring their arguments and in using too informal a style in their writing. In discussion they are creative in their thinking, for example about reforming the House of Lords, but less assured in considering the impact of their ideas.
164. Teaching and learning are very good. Excellent subject knowledge has a significant impact. The very high level of challenge in discussion work reinforces the development of skills in analysis and evaluation. Teachers keep abreast of key topical issues so that students in turn have a strong grasp of the subject in relation to today's world. At the same time, the historical context of key ideas and institutions is examined in depth. This enables students to gain a very good understanding of changes over time. Enthusiasm for the subject transmits itself to students who in turn respond with very positive attitudes. Active learning in the classroom, for example through decision-making activities, prepares students very well for reaching reasoned conclusions in their writing. The sustained challenge evident in whole-class discussion is not always matched by the productivity in group work. Assessment is very thorough with students given detailed analyses of strengths and weaknesses in their writing. Occasionally there is insufficient explicit advice on how to improve.
165. Leadership is very good. Staff collaborate very well as a result of very effective leadership. There is a great enthusiasm for the subject that has a very positive impact on students' attitudes. The course is popular and retention rates are very high. The

curriculum has been developed to meet the needs of a wide range of students who all start in Year 12 with no previous experience of the subject. The course makes a very good contribution to students' personal development. By Year 13 they display maturity of thought regarding contemporary political issues. Management is good. High quality resources are well organised and available to support learning throughout the course. There was no report for the subject at the last inspection.

History

Provision in history is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good subject knowledge of teachers is raising students' achievement.
- Support for students' personal study is enabling them to achieve very well.
- The students' visit to Auschwitz provides a profound opportunity for spiritual development.
- Monitoring of students' wider reading is inconsistent.

Commentary

166. Results in the 2004 A-level examination were above average. Achievement was very good in relation to students' prior attainment. There is a rising trend in results and all students in 2004 obtained at least a pass grade.
167. Standards in Year 13 are above average and achievement is very good. Students use sources confidently to obtain accurate information regarding the opinions of the day, and present them succinctly. They have a good understanding of the periods covered and are able to hypothesise about events and their causes. Essays are clear and detailed and focus on relevant information. Information is generally well organised and students recognise the need to develop their responses to a sound conclusion. Lower attaining students occasionally fail to plan effectively and present narrative rather than reasoned responses to questions. Higher attaining students develop clear discursive essays and reach judgements that they support with evidence. Coursework titles have a challenging focus and are well researched and students present a clear response to an enquiry.
168. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good. The pace of lessons is brisk and students are actively involved. They collaborate well and work in partnership with their teachers. Students are encouraged to reflect on their work and to become familiar with the criteria for success through their own evaluation of their responses. The very good subject knowledge of teachers is raising students' achievement. Teachers encourage students to develop their understanding of the periods through the use of challenging titles for essays that require analysis and review of what is learnt. Students are kept aware of their target grades and the high aspirations of their teachers are encouraging them to exceed them. Students are encouraged to read widely, but monitoring of this reading is inconsistent.
169. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The range of specialist knowledge within the department enables students to have a choice of course and allows staff to respond to individual interests. The recent sixth form visit to First World War sites and to the camp at Auschwitz, has proved to be a profound experience and has enriched their appreciation of events. Students are encouraged to use the facilities of higher education institutions and this raises their own expectations. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good because of the rising trend in results.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results have continued to be well above average.
- Lively, informed and varied teaching produces a very good response from enthusiastic and thoughtful students.
- Progressive leadership has led to innovative approaches to learning.

Commentary

170. In 2004, results at AS-level and A-level were well above average. The value added score of the department, which has the largest A-level entry in the school, was the second highest of all subjects. Over time, increasing numbers of students, some with modest GCSE results, have regularly performed much better than predicted. Achievement, therefore, has been very good.
171. Standards are well above average. In class students demonstrate the ability to recall, synthesise and develop their subject knowledge. They provide clear answers and ideas in response to teacher questions. Their writing is clear and concise. The best written work is well researched, accurate, and uses evidence appropriately. Occasionally students make statements about psychologists (eg Carl Rogers) that suggest they do not have a full picture of the contribution the researcher has made to the subject, because the student focus is on a particular piece of research. Year 12 students are able to produce accurate 'mind maps' summarising different aspects of important areas for debate like the relative influence of nature and nurture.
172. Students achieve very well because of the quality of support they receive. Assessment is regular and thorough. Student views on teaching are regularly checked; indeed, subject learning interviews were piloted in the department. The poorer performance of boys in coursework is being successfully addressed. Bridging tasks support the move from GCSE to AS and thence to A-level. There are regular activities to support gifted students.
173. Teaching is very good. There is an unusually strong focus on how learning is taking place, and the effectiveness of different methods of teaching and learning, as well as on understanding the content of the subject. There is also regular emphasis on how work will be assessed and therefore on how to write to maximise marks earned. There is a proper emphasis on using the right general and technical vocabulary. All this occurs within well-structured, lively lessons, in which no time is wasted. Staff and students work enthusiastically; rapport between them is excellent. On occasions the amount of material in the lesson leads to hurried consideration of topics.
174. Learning is very good. Although occasionally hesitant, most students show a good understanding of the subject and are not afraid to discuss and write about it whether individually, in small groups or as a whole class. They develop the skills to work independently early in the course. Their recall of topics is usually accurate and even at AS-level they can grasp the connection between different sources of information, for example on conformity, and can apply it to their own situation. Year 13 successfully applied revised knowledge on measurement in psychology to a series of experimental situations.
175. Leadership and management are both very good. Staff have worked as hard on their own development as they have on designing the schemes of work for the course, which have a welcome emphasis on methodology. The relatively new head of department is well supported by a more senior member of staff. The quality of data analysis is good and leads to action for improvement. The department has successfully pioneered a 'fast track' version of the course.
176. There was no detailed report on the subject at the previous inspection. There is reference to very good teaching and achievement, and these have been sustained.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus in this inspection was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is good, giving a clear direction for improvement.
- Students' very good attitudes and motivation contribute significantly to their good achievement.
- Teachers support students' learning very well.
- Links with local companies are good and bring practical opportunities that benefit students well.

Commentary

177. In the 2004 A-level examinations results were well above average. Analysis of the results of individual students shows that in all cases their achievement was good.
178. Standards are above average. Students respond well to the challenge of design projects, showing creativity and a willingness to try new ideas. They develop and present their work in design folios, which are very well presented and annotated and are of high quality. Students use ICT well to enhance their work. As part of evaluation, students assess their own and each other's work against existing products, defend their decisions and explain their findings clearly. In a Year 12 product design class, for example, each student had the opportunity to receive constructive feedback and evaluation of their initial project ideas from other members of the group.
179. Students' achievement is good. The very good relationships and mutual trust and respect between students contribute to achievement. In addition, students can choose to specialise in food technology, systems and control or product design. In this way their studies are closely linked to their individual interests and ambitions and their motivation and commitment are high.
180. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers work as a team to provide a programme that covers the examination requirements well. They structure the courses using a range of learning activities and place strong emphasis on designing and making to a high standard. They provide opportunities for students to study industrial processes and the work of other designers. For example, a systems and control student, working with a local engineering company, was developing an intelligent sensing device to give an early warning of potential bearing failure in industrial processes. This very challenging project has received national recognition. Teachers know the interests, strengths and weaknesses of individual students very well and give very good one-to-one support. They assess students' work accurately and give them detailed constructive feedback on ways to improve. Students are tracked carefully at all stages of their courses and target setting is realistic. They appreciate the help and advice given.
181. Leadership is good. Teachers have an enthusiasm for design and technology and are committed to high standards. Management is good. Teachers teach to their strengths and have clear roles and responsibilities for different parts of the course. They meet regularly to plan and discuss work and there is a shared commitment to succeed. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. New courses have

been offered, standards are above average, students stay on their courses and the take-up rate is rising.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus in this inspection was on art and design and performance studies.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved as a result of very good teaching.
- Teachers' very good support and encouragement are major factors in students' very good achievement.
- Effective use of ICT ensures high standards of creativity in graphics.

Commentary

182. Results in A-level examinations in 2004 were well above average. Results have improved since the previous inspection and show an upward trend.
183. In work seen during the inspection standards are well above average at AS and A-level. Achievement is very good. From the start of their course students make rapid gains in ICT skills and have a very good understanding of how to use and control media. As a result of this they are able to achieve their creative potential. This very good progress both in art and design and art and design graphics is a result of technical skills development and the opportunity to use a wide variety of media. Cultural visits and enrichment opportunities further support students' learning. Because of this they are able to work together with the school and local community on joint projects and share ideas with visiting artists. This gives them confidence and helps them explore new ways of working away from the classroom. Students' vocational language and their ability to articulate clearly when critically assessing the work of artists and their own work are less well developed. As a result of this annotations in sketchbooks are not always of sufficient quality to gain the highest marks.
184. Teaching is very good and promotes very good learning. Teachers have a good command of subject knowledge which enables them to provide high quality demonstrations. This allows them to explain difficult concepts clearly whilst establishing high expectations. Significant amongst teachers' strengths are the very good support and guidance opportunities offered to students both in class time and in the many enrichment programmes offered. Students have 'open door' access to the art studio for the practical completion of work and for research. They are also able to access the curriculum 'on line' and evaluate their own work through detailed shared assessment commentaries. These make a major contribution to students' achievement
185. Leadership is very good. Very clear direction is set for the department's work and its progressive development. Management is very good. Schemes of work have been revised and assessment procedures within some teaching groups are excellent. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards are higher and

achievement has improved through the many opportunities for enrichment which extend beyond the classroom.

Performance studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching ensures students reach high standards and achieve very well.
- Very strong relationships contribute significantly to students' achievement.
- Leadership combines very well the serious purpose of obtaining high standards with much pleasure and enjoyment. A very effective team with a common approach manages the course very well.

Commentary

186. School information shows that results have been well above average over the last four years. Boys have performed equally as well as girls and all students have obtained at least a pass grade.
187. Standards in Year 13 are well above average and in line with previous results. Students' attainment has several strong features. They are skilled in expressing imaginative ideas through controlled movement. They understand context and implied meaning well, and have a strong sense of an idea's potential for performance whether the stimulus is visual, musical or written. They are able to talk about their performance work intelligently, confidently and with enthusiasm. Written work is well organised and shows evidence of wider reading from significant artists and educators like Kandinsky, Chadderton and Moore. Their writing shows keen awareness of and insight into their own and the group's contribution to work. Students have particularly strong skills in the dance element of the course – movement is athletic but also fluent, expressive and controlled. Standards of performance are impressively high.
188. Students achieve very well especially given that many students have little or no experience of at least one element of performance studies, and the several students that join the course from other schools have to establish new relationships. Achievement is fostered by the stress on the importance of working together; the strong relationships based on trust between students themselves and between students and teachers mean that rapid gains are made.
189. Teaching and learning are very good, contributing significantly to students' achievement. Teachers have comprehensive subject knowledge and expertise; as a result they can explain and illustrate clearly how to tackle difficult concepts and skills. They use a very good variety of approaches so that students have different ways to explore their work. They place a strong emphasis on individual and group evaluation that ensures students' independent learning and mature responsibility for each other very well. Overall, assessment is good. Teachers provide very good feedback in performance work, so that students can rapidly make adjustments and develop further. Marking of written work, though thorough and constructive, does not always make clear what students need to do to improve.
190. Very good leadership is focused on creating a sense of excitement in the subject married to a serious intent – high standards. The course is managed very effectively by a specialist team with a consistent approach. There are very good links with music and drama and impressive results being obtained in GCSE performing arts. Bold and exciting projects are undertaken, such as live performances in Newcastle's Central Station, and the talents of gifted students are fostered very well. The course did not exist at the time of the previous inspection, but has come on apace since its introduction. With two groups in Year 12 this year and three specialist teachers, the capacity for further improvement is good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Subjects in this curriculum area were not a focus for this inspection, but a lesson in **physical education** was sampled. Year 13 students benefited considerably from an exercise in evaluation of students' own performance in rugby and badminton. Not only did

students show well above average skills but the teacher's expertise helped students to refine their observations very successfully.

BUSINESS

The focus in this inspection was on the advanced vocational course in business studies.

Two lessons in **economics** were also sampled, where good teaching led to good learning about the retail price index as a measure of inflation. Work was effectively related to examination requirements so that students' achievement was supported well.

Business studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is very good because of very good teaching.
- Learning about the real world is reinforced very effectively because of very good business links.
- Students know how to improve because of very effective assessment procedures.
- Very good planning and organisation support students' learning very well.

Commentary

191. AVCE results were well above average in 2004. Girls' higher grade results were much better than boys'. Results in 2003 were average with no significant differences between boys' and girls' results. The course attracts students with a very wide range of prior attainment at GCSE with significant differences in the starting points of groups in one year compared with another. There are also variations year on year in the numbers of students who have taken the subject at GCSE.
192. In Year 13 standards are above average with no significant differences between boys and girls. Achievement is very good with the majority of students exceeding predicted grades in portfolio assignments. Investigation skills are very strong and students display a 'real world' understanding in writing about their chosen businesses. Very good business links significantly enhance this understanding. The majority apply theory well to the real world and successfully combine the two in their completed assignments. Higher attainers in particular evaluate business practice well and examine alternative approaches. ICT is very well used for research and for presenting findings. The quality of primary research is weaker in the case of lower attainers as is an appreciation of its limitations. In work on examined modules Year 12 students display some weaknesses in technique; they do not, for example, restrict their responses specifically to the requirements of the question.
193. Teaching and learning are very good. Planning has a significant impact on learning. Students are supported very well through very well organised resources that are readily available within the department and through the school's ICT systems. An 'open door' policy means that teaching typically occurs within both formal and informal settings so that students have frequent opportunities to consolidate their learning. Assessment procedures are very effective in giving students knowledge of their own learning including the regular use of self-assessment and systems for tracking progress to which students have full access. ICT is routinely used in most of the

teaching so that students have frequent opportunities to see key points in summary form. In some teaching opportunities are missed to provide such summaries and to check individual understanding through self-assessment. The real business world is integrated very well into teaching and learning, for example students becoming 'mystery shoppers' to evaluate customer service in a business. Very strong business links enhance the quality of portfolio work. Activities in the classroom typically encourage independent learning and this equips students very well for undertaking the individual assignments to which the majority of marks are allocated.

194. Leadership and management are very good. The department has very effectively evolved a network of support for students' learning both inside and outside of formal classroom settings. The very positive outcome from this is the development of independent learning skills and the knowledge of how to improve. The provision has proved successful with a wide range of students and with groups that are quite different in terms of prior attainment. The high quality of business links significantly enhances the quality of learning. There was no separate business studies report at the time of the previous inspection.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

195. An effective general studies programme is provided for all students in Year 12 and for those who choose to continue to A2 level in Year 13. These students are supported by material available on the school's Intranet for independent learning and by teachers who can give advice and guidance to individuals or groups at set times during the week. Students obtained above average results at AS and A2 level in 2004.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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