

INSPECTION REPORT

THE SANDON SCHOOL

Sandon, Chelmsford

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115379

Headteacher: Mr J Wincott

Lead inspector: Mr J Bald

Dates of inspection: 7th to 10th March 2005

Inspection number: 268985

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1248
School address:	Molrams Lane Chelmsford Essex
Postcode:	CM2 7AQ
Telephone number:	01245 473611
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs H Lyne
Date of previous inspection:	March 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Sandon School is above average in size, and has been a specialist mathematics and computing college since September, 2004. It holds the Investors in People award, and a local authority Heartbeat award for its school meals. Most of its students are white, and around a tenth come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of students with English as an additional language is very small, with none in the early stages of learning English. Standards among students joining the school are broadly average overall, but were above average in Year 7 in the year of the inspection. The highest-attaining students often attend local selective schools, but the proportion of students with special educational needs is below average. Most of these students have difficulties with language and literacy, and some with behaviour. The school population is stable. Many students have a long journey to school, and two-thirds rely on school buses. Students have a wide range of backgrounds, and their overall social and economic circumstances are a little above average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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13706	Daljit Singh	Lay inspector	
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	English
33711	Michael Hird	Team inspector	Mathematics
2711	Alan Jarvis	Team inspector	Science, main school. Chemistry, sixth form
1759	Geoffrey Edwards	Team inspector	Design and technology
2048	Douglas Masterton	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
31649	Richard Marsden	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
4223	Garth Collard	Team inspector	History
32329	Andrew Stafford	Team inspector	Art and design
8360	Frederick Peacock	Team inspector	Music, special educational needs
15011	Marion Wallace	Team inspector	Physical education
12003	Andrew Marfleet	Team inspector	Religious education
32229	Mary Comer	Team inspector	Work-related learning, business studies
20832	Mohindar Galowalia	Team inspector	Biology (sixth form)
33115	Martin Horne	Team inspector	Geography

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The Sandon school provides satisfactory education, and has good features. Students join with average standards, and reach average overall standards in Year 11 and the sixth form. Achievement is satisfactory, and is improving. Most students have very good attitudes to work and take pride in their school, though a minority do not. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with good features. Leadership and management are good overall, and the headteacher's leadership and strategic guidance are very good. The cost per student is below average, and value for money is good.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher and chair of governors have established a clear pattern of improvement in the school.
- The best teaching is outstanding, and there is a strong commitment to improvement throughout the school.
- Some teaching has weaknesses in matching work to students' learning needs, and in the management of classes.
- The school takes effective action to promote good behaviour and attendance, and to deal with lapses when they occur.
- Provision is very good in physical education, but unsatisfactory in French and citizenship.
- The mathematics and computing college promotes good relationships with other schools and the community.
- The co-ordination of provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) across subjects needs further development.
- There are good opportunities for the enrichment of learning outside lessons and very good opportunities for sport.

The school was last inspected in March 1999, and it has made satisfactory improvements since then. There has been satisfactory progress on points raised for action, though further work is needed on teaching and the curriculum. Standards in modern languages have fallen, but the trend of improvement at GCSE is above average. The school's current rate of improvement is good.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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.*

Achievement is satisfactory. It is satisfactory, with good features, in Year 9 and Year 11. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average in Year 9, and average in Year 11, where standards in some subjects were lower than the 2004 GCSE results. Students achieve well in English and science, and very well in physical education and in work sampled in drama and business studies. Achievement in most other subjects

ranges from satisfactory to good, but is unsatisfactory in modern languages and citizenship. Students with special educational needs achieve well. The achievement of gifted and talented students is satisfactory overall, and very good in ICT. Boys reach similar standards to girls at GCSE. Sixth form achievement is satisfactory. Standards are average, though male sixth formers tend to achieve lower grades than female students.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory and have good features. Behaviour and attitudes are good overall, and attendance is average. Most behaviour is very good, and the school takes effective action to tackle lapses and promote attendance. All but a small minority of students have very good attitudes. They are proud of their school and contribute to its improvement.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is satisfactory. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teaching is good or better in three-fifths of lessons, and some excellent teaching was seen in English, physical education and drama. In good lessons, teachers plan interesting work, pitched at the right level for students, and manage classes well. Most other teaching is satisfactory, but some lessons have weaknesses in managing classes and in matching work closely to the needs of students.

The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of learning opportunities, with good opportunities for learning outside lessons and very good opportunities for sports. Accommodation and resources for learning are satisfactory, and are being improved through the specialist mathematics and computing college and refurbishment. The Atlas learning centre, which includes the library, is very well used and effective. The school has had recent staffing difficulties in some subjects, but is now adequately staffed. It makes good provision for students' welfare, health and safety, including healthy and interesting meals, and consults and involves students well. Guidance is satisfactory, and good in work-related learning. The school's relationship with parents is satisfactory, and it has good relationships with other schools and the community. The specialist college makes an important contribution to this work.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's very good leadership and management give clear direction and are improving the school. Other aspects of management are good in the main school, and satisfactory in the sixth form. Governance is good. It is good in the main school, with an outstanding contribution from the chair of governors, and satisfactory in the sixth form. Statutory requirements are not met for a daily act of collective worship, citizenship in the main school, and religious education for some Year 13 students.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students have a satisfactory view of the school. They are satisfied with most teaching and behaviour, though both parents and students said that some lessons were disrupted by poor behaviour, and that homework was not always set. Inspectors found that behaviour was good, and that the school took action on lapses. They found some gaps in homework. Students said that the school was improving, and that they enjoyed their lunches.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Take further action to improve the consistency of teaching, homework and the match of work to students' learning needs.
- Take further steps to improve all aspects of provision in modern foreign languages.
- Improve the co-ordination of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in the main school and sixth form.
- Improve guidance to sixth form students, particularly on the transition from GCSE to A-level.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Meet requirements for citizenship and collective worship, and for religious education in Year 13.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE SANDON SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. A high proportion of students stay on to the sixth form, though some higher-attaining students move to selective schools. The sixth form has grown since the last inspection. Students begin with broadly average overall standards for their courses, and their A-level results are also within the average band, though male students tend to do less well in examinations than female students. Some students have weaknesses in their literacy and ICT skills. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are important strengths in the best teaching, but some students do not work consistently enough outside lessons. Leadership and management are satisfactory; day-to-day management is good, but strategic management and development planning need improvement. The sixth form's cost-effectiveness is satisfactory.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Achievement is satisfactory, but some students could achieve more by working more consistently outside lessons.
- Progress is assessed and tracked well, but students need more guidance on the transition to sixth form work.
- Teachers form good working relationships with students, and provide much additional personal support for learning.
- Provision for developing students' key skills, including general studies provision, needs further development.
- Teaching and learning are very good in business studies; in work sampled, they were very good in sports studies, and excellent in drama.
- Provision in French is unsatisfactory.

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
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English, languages and communication	<p>Good in English. Students make good progress from their GCSE results to reach average standards, though there are few A and B grades.</p> <p>Unsatisfactory in French. The failure rate is high, teaching is not effectively organised, and students in Year 12 are not making satisfactory progress.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Satisfactory. Standards are below average, and represent satisfactory progress and achievement from students' GCSE results. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and transition to A-level is well managed.</p>
Science	<p>Satisfactory in biology and chemistry. A-level results have been below average, but standards in both subjects are improving. Teaching is satisfactory in chemistry and good in biology. Learning is satisfactory, but some students need more guidance on A-level work.</p>
Information and communication technology	<p>Good. There is a high pass rate, though mostly at lower grades, and achievement from students' GCSE results is good. Teaching and learning are good, and students are adapting increasingly well to sixth form work.</p>
Humanities	<p>Satisfactory in history. Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Good leadership is helping to raise standards, but some students have weak literacy skills.</p>

Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Satisfactory in design and technology. Examination results have been well below average, but work seen during the inspection showed some improvement, and current achievement is just satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Some aspects of management require improvement.
Visual and performing arts and media	Good in art and design. Effective leadership and management are helping the department recover from recent low standards, and work seen during the inspection was broadly average in quality. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching and learning sampled in drama were excellent.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Work sampled in sports studies was very good. A-level results are well above average, and the standard of work sampled during the inspection was equally high. Teaching and learning seen were very good.
Business	Very good. A-level results are broadly average, but the standard of work seen during the inspection was well above average in Year 13. Teaching and learning are very good, and the subject is led and managed very well.
General education	Work sampled in general studies was satisfactory in Year 13, but unsatisfactory in Year 12. The general studies programme is not making an effective contribution to developing sixth formers' key skills.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Advice, guidance and support are satisfactory. Students' progress is tracked well, and they receive much additional help from teachers outside lessons. However, most need more guidance than they receive on the transition from GCSE to sixth form work, and in the organisation of their learning outside lessons. Students have good guidance on the range of courses available, and on their options for higher education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Day-to-day management is good. Strategic management by the senior management team, and governors' monitoring of the sixth form, are satisfactory, but are not supported by strategic development planning.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students were broadly satisfied with their sixth form education, and appreciated the additional support they received from teachers outside lessons. Some parents of sixth form students said that the school not been able to secure specialist staff to cover for staff absence. The school accepted that this was a difficulty, and there was one example during the inspection of work that was still recovering from the effects of a long-term absence.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement throughout the main school and sixth form is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average in Year 11 and in the sixth form, and the overall standard of work seen in Year 9 was above average. There is a trend of improvement in the main school, and students with special educational needs do well. Male sixth formers tend to achieve lower results than female students, but the gap was narrowing in work seen during the inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall achievement is good in English, science, music and humanities subjects. It is very good in physical education and drama.
- There is good achievement in the flexible learning ASDAN course.
- Achievement in modern foreign languages is unsatisfactory, though some progress is being made in German.
- Sixth form results are average overall, and achievement is satisfactory, but there is a very wide variation between subjects at AS and A-level.
- A-level results are well above average in sports studies, media studies and drama.
- Some sixth formers have weak literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, and need to work harder outside lessons.
- Good assessment procedures help the school to track sixth form progress and achievement effectively.

Commentary

1. Students in most year groups joined the school with average overall standards for their age, though students in Year 7 at the time of the inspection had reached above average standards in national tests in their primary schools. Overall progress in Years 7 to 9, and achievement in national tests, is satisfactory, with above average results in mathematics over the past two years. Test results in 2004 showed good improvement on those from 2003. The standard of work seen during the inspection showed improvement from these national test results, and was above average in English, mathematics, science, history, geography and physical education. It was average in most other subjects. Students' language and literacy skills are broadly average in Year 9.
2. In modern languages, standards were below average in German, and well below average in French. Standards in both languages have been affected by staffing difficulties. Students were making satisfactory progress during the inspection in German, but not in French, and achievement in both languages is still unsatisfactory. The school had begun to take action to improve provision in languages by the time of the inspection, and intensified this following feedback. Students have less knowledge and understanding of some aspects of the National Curriculum for citizenship than expected for their age, though their participation in citizenship activities is good. Overall, achievement in Year 9 is satisfactory. It has good features, and work seen in most subjects during the inspection indicates that the steps taken by the headteacher and governors to raise standards are making a significant impact.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.6 (34.5)	33.3 (33.4)
mathematics	37.4 (37.4)	35.5 (35.4)
science	33.9 (35.0)	33.1 (33.6)

There were 215 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. GCSE results were broadly average in 2003, but improved to above average levels in 2004. These results were better than those of similar schools. They showed good improvement from students' results in Year 9 tests, and satisfactory achievement from the standards they had reached when they joined Year 7. Results were above average in English, English literature, business studies and physical education. Results in most other subjects were close to average levels, but below average in German. The overall standard of Year 11 work seen during the inspection was broadly average, with above average standards in English, science, music and physical education, which included well above average standards in the GCSE course. Standards in other subjects, including mathematics, were broadly average, but standards in French and German were below average. Despite some improvement in German by the time of the inspection, achievement in both languages is unsatisfactory. Overall, standards in Year 11 represent satisfactory achievement from students' starting points, and have good features, including an above average trend of improvement in GCSE results.

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	60 (50)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (88)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	302.7 (38.9)	282.5 (34.7)

There were 214 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. A new system of calculating points was introduced in 2004.

4. The school exceeded its targets for Year 11 in 2004, but did not meet its targets for Year 9, which were set at a very high level. Girls do a little better than boys at GCSE, but the gap is much smaller than in most schools. Good specialist teaching enables students with special educational needs to achieve well throughout the school. The achievements of gifted and talented students are satisfactory overall. They do well where specialist provision is available, and very well in A-level ICT classes in Years 10 and 11. The headteacher, senior staff and governors have a clear picture of patterns of achievement across the school, and are working consistently and effectively to improve it. They have established a clear pattern of improvement in Year 9 and Year 11, and are very well placed to raise standards and achievement further.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	86.9 (87.7)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	19.7 (26.4)	36.2 (35.6)

Average point score per student	246.1 (275.9)	265.2 (258.2)
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There were 67 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

- Standards in the sixth form are within the average range overall, and represent satisfactory achievement from students' starting points. There is, however, a wide variation in standards and achievement between subjects, both at A-level and at AS, where results are affected by weaknesses in students' transition to A-level work. The standard of work seen during the inspection showed significant improvements on these examination results in several subjects, particularly sciences. Significant weaknesses remain, however, in general studies and in French, and achievement is unsatisfactory in both subjects in Year 12. Female students did substantially better than male students in 2004, but there were no significant differences in the quality of male and female students' work during the inspection, except for information technology, where female students were achieving more. Standards in a small number of subjects were still recovering from the effects of long-term staff absence. The school's action to tackle this problem was, however, proving effective by the time of the inspection.
- Good assessment procedures enable teachers to identify under-achievement quickly and to provide guidance where it is needed. This is leading to more consistency in students' work and achievement, though discussions with sixth form students, particularly male students, indicated that some still need to work more consistently outside lessons. Strategic management of provision for key skills and for guidance for students on adapting to sixth form work is not focused closely enough on these issues.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The overall quality of behaviour is good throughout the school; most is very good, but there are some lapses. Students' attitudes are good in the main school, and satisfactory in the sixth form. Attendance is broadly average, and punctuality is satisfactory. Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory overall, and has good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In most subjects, students approach learning with enthusiasm. They respond very well to good teaching.
- Students in the main school use their time wisely outside lessons, and many take part in enrichment activities.
- Relationships are almost always good, and contribute to a friendly and welcoming environment.
- The school takes effective action to tackle lapses in good behaviour.
- Students serve their school and the wider community with pride and loyalty.
- Some assemblies make a good contribution to spiritual development, but they do not contain a daily act of collective worship.
- Some sixth form students work well in lessons, but do not do enough additional study outside lessons.

Commentary

- Almost all students are interested in their work and willing to learn. They respond very well to good and better teaching, and most sustain concentration well even when teaching is less inspiring. In almost all lessons, students co-operate well, and work hard in groups. They ask sensible questions, and listen well to each other and to their

teachers. Most complete homework on time, and use their time outside lessons well, for example, by reading or taking part in sports and other enrichment activities. Some spoke passionately about the opportunity to learn and develop their dance, drama and singing skills. Students spoke affectionately about teachers who give their time outside lessons to support their education and enhance their achievements. Several commented positively on the current climate of improvement in the school, particularly under the influence of the headteacher.

8. Students and parents told inspectors that there was some disruption to lessons from a minority of students, particularly in Year 8. The school had taken action to deal with this by the time of the inspection, and there were only isolated examples of unsatisfactory behaviour, chiefly in response to weaknesses in class management. Behaviour around the school is generally good. Students show good patience when using the cramped dining facilities. Nevertheless, while the number of students excluded is low for a school of this size, there are significantly more exclusions than at the time of the last inspection. The school works hard and effectively to keep exclusion to a minimum and permanent exclusions are very low. The school has worked successfully with a significant number of students who have previously been excluded from other schools.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1051	71	1
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – Any other White background	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	7	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	5	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	164	0	0

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

9. Students have good opportunities to take responsibility within the school, and to serve the wider community. Students work as buddies supporting younger students by offering support, advice and guidance and helping to sort out relationship problems. Students serve on the school council as year representatives, and Year 11 students work with staff as prefects to ensure discipline. All year groups are trained as school librarians to work and serve the school community. Students undertake these positions of responsibility with pride.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.5	School data	0.9
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.

10. The school's figures include periods of study leave that are counted as authorised absence. Once this is taken into account, current attendance is broadly average. The school has effective systems for promoting good attendance, but a small number of students have poor attendance records. Punctuality is satisfactory.

Personal development

11. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has not changed significantly since the previous inspection: it is still satisfactory overall, and good in moral and social development.
12. There is satisfactory provision for spiritual development. There are strengths in English, where many of the texts require a consideration of spirituality, in art, where the beauty of natural forms and artefacts is considered, and in religious education, where the spiritual dimension of religion is dealt with thoroughly. In some aspects of the GCSE courses, this goes beyond what is normally seen. In most subjects, however, opportunities to consider non-material aspects of life are passed by. Some assemblies make an effective contribution to spiritual development, particularly when they include accounts of moving personal experiences, but they do not include a daily act of collective worship.
13. Provision for moral and social development is good. Students know the principles of right and wrong, and this is reflected in their good behaviour. Moral and social issues are discussed in lessons, and students take them seriously. Opportunities to work together in lessons are well used, as are the range of activities, sporting and cultural, that the school provides. Opportunities to take responsibility, and to exercise it for the benefit of the community, make an important contribution to moral and social development.
14. Overall, provision for cultural development is satisfactory. There are school visits and opportunities for development in the arts, but no more than is found in most schools. There is not a particularly strong emphasis on other cultures, apart from where syllabuses require this, such as in the study of poems from other cultures in English, in art and music from around the world, or Asian foods prepared in technology lessons. The fact that there is a lack of diversity in the school population means that students need better preparation for the wider world.

Sixth form

15. Sixth form students behave well and their attitudes to school are satisfactory, with good features. Students work hard in lessons, particularly when the teaching is good, and most work hard on preparation outside lessons, though relatively few read widely.

A significant minority of students do not work as hard outside lessons as they need to if they are to reach grades A and B in their A-levels. There are particular weaknesses in some students' adaptation to the demands of sixth form work when they join Year 12, and this contributes to lower standards at AS than most achieve at A-level. There are some lapses in punctuality to lessons, and attendance is poor in general studies in Year 12. Overall, however, attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. Sixth form students are very willing to accept responsibility within the school, and the guidance and support they provide make an important contribution to younger students' personal development.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is satisfactory. It has good features, and relatively few weaknesses. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with significant strengths, in the main school and sixth form, and the curriculum provides satisfactory learning opportunities, with good opportunities for learning outside lessons. Students have good opportunities to become involved in the work of the school and to influence decisions. There is good provision for their health and safety, and the guidance they receive is satisfactory. The school has a good working relationship with other schools and the community, and a satisfactory partnership with parents. Current developments, particularly in leadership and management and the use of ICT, are improving the quality of education.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in the main school and in the sixth form, and there are very strong features in the best teaching. The quality and use of assessment are satisfactory in the main school, and good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good or better in three-fifths of lessons, and the best teaching is outstanding.
- Teaching is very good in physical education, and in English and music in Years 10 and 11.
- The headteacher and senior managers monitor teaching closely, and take effective action to improve it.
- Teaching in some lessons in the main school has weaknesses in the match of work to students' learning needs.
- A small minority of lessons have significant weaknesses in planning, pace and class management.
- Teaching in French is satisfactory in some lessons, but its overall impact on learning is unsatisfactory.
- Most teachers set regular and effective homework, but there are gaps in some classes.
- Some learning in the sixth form is held up by weaknesses in students' work outside lessons.
- Good assessment and close tracking of progress in the sixth form gives managers a clear picture of learning and achievement.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 178 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6 (3)	28 (16)	76 (43)	58 (33)	7 (4)	3 (2)	0

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

16. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, and it has significant strengths. Teachers use the school's guidance on effective teaching, and its planning structures, to ensure clear learning goals in each lesson. In the three-fifths of lessons where teaching is good or better, they use assessment well to ensure that work is well matched to students' learning needs and manage classes well, fostering good relationships and promoting a good pace of work. Teachers in these lessons know their subjects well, and design learning activities that interest students. They mark work well, set regular and effective homework, and give good guidance and feedback on progress. Where the teaching is very good, these strengths are enhanced by very good insights into the learning patterns of students in the class, and by very high levels of subject knowledge and understanding that enable teachers to match work very closely to students' needs, coupled with very strong relationships. This creates an atmosphere in which students are keen to do their very best, and leads to very good achievement within the lessons. The excellent lessons show exceptionally high levels of professional expertise, outstanding planning and the highest possible expectations of students of all abilities and aptitudes. The excellent teaching seen during the inspection took place in physical education, drama and English.
17. Where teaching is satisfactory, sound planning ensures adequate learning, but information from assessment is not used to match work closely to the learning needs of the class, so that some students make less progress than they could. A significant minority of these lessons showed weaknesses in managing the class, leading in some cases to slow pace and wandering attention from students, and in others to uncomfortable relationships and raised voices. While most teachers mark books effectively and set regular homework, there are gaps in both areas in some classes, and this hinders long-term achievement. The small minority of lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory or poor have significant weaknesses in class management, planning and the use of assessment. Teaching in these lessons confirms concerns expressed by parents prior to the inspection. However, energetic and well-focused monitoring and guidance by the headteacher and senior staff have made a significant impact on the extent of these weaknesses, and this trend is set to continue.
18. Teaching in physical education is very good throughout the school. Teaching in English and music is good in Years 7 to 9, and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching in science, religious education and geography is good throughout the school, and there is good teaching in mathematics in Years 7 to 9. Teaching in other subjects ranges from satisfactory to good, though there is some unsatisfactory teaching in individual lessons in mathematics. Teaching in French is not matched closely enough to the learning needs of the students, and its overall impact is unsatisfactory. The deployment of advanced skills teachers to these classes has ensured a calm learning atmosphere and good behaviour, which provide a good basis for improving standards. Good specialist teaching for students with special educational needs ensures that they make good progress towards their learning targets; provision for these students in lessons across the school is satisfactory. Teaching makes satisfactory provision for the needs of gifted and talented students, with very good provision for those in Years 10 and 11 taking A-level ICT. Teachers make satisfactory provision for literacy and numeracy and

ICT skills in their work, but there is room for further development in all three of these areas in most subjects.

19. The management of teaching is good. The headteacher, senior staff and governors have put improving teaching at the heart of their programme for developing the work of the school and raising standards. They have used performance management effectively to reward good teaching and set targets for improvement, have made improvements to the use of staff training days, and take good care over the appointment of new staff. They know the strengths and weaknesses in teaching well, and are taking effective action to improve it.

Sixth form

20. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Sixth form teachers know their subjects well, and plan interesting work that engages students' interest. There are good relationships between students and teachers, and students told inspectors that teachers provided much extra help outside lessons. In most subjects, however, students do not receive enough guidance on the demands of A-level work in comparison with those of GCSE. As a result, some of the benefits of good teaching in the classroom are lost, and students do not develop the skills needed for advanced work quickly enough. Teaching is unsatisfactory in French, and in general studies in Year 12, where students' key skills are not effectively developed. In physical education and business studies, very good teaching ensures that work is closely matched to students' needs and provides very effective guidance on the demands of A-level work. As a result, achievement in these subjects during the inspection was very good.
21. The overall quality of sixth form assessment is good. It is very good in English, physical education and business studies, and satisfactory to good in all other subjects except French, where its use is inadequate. In almost all subjects, students receive good feedback on their work, and progress is closely tracked, with additional support through mentoring where they fall behind their target grades.

The curriculum

The curriculum makes satisfactory overall provision for the needs of all groups of students in the main school and the sixth form, though there are some areas requiring improvement. Opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities are good. The quality of accommodation is satisfactory overall, and resources for learning are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Newly improved facilities, particularly in ICT, are beginning to make an impact on learning.
- Good opportunities are provided for extra-curricular activities, and very good opportunities for sport.
- There is too little time for citizenship, and there are timetabling weaknesses in modern languages.
- Good opportunities are provided for fast-tracking students in ICT and science.
- The flexible learning ASDAN course is well thought out and effective.
- There is effective provision for students with special educational needs through specialist teaching.

- General studies is not making a consistently effective contribution to the sixth form curriculum.
- There is no religious education for some Year 13 students.

Commentary

22. The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of learning opportunities for all students. Statutory requirements are met for all subjects except citizenship, which has too little time to cover the National Curriculum programme of study. Senior managers have prepared a new timetable for the next year that will improve provision for this subject. There are also some timetabling weaknesses in provision for French and German. The school's new status as a mathematics and computing college is having a positive impact on the curriculum, though the use of ICT to promote learning across the school is still at a relatively early stage of development. Provision for literacy and numeracy skills in the curriculum is satisfactory, but depends too much on the work of individual teachers and subjects, and its co-ordination needs to be improved. It was not possible to observe personal, social and health education provision during the inspection because of the timetable, but planning indicated that it was making a satisfactory contribution to personal development.
23. Students in Years 10 and 11 have a satisfactory range of options, and there is good provision for work-related learning, including an effective flexible learning vocational course. There is increasingly effective provision for higher-attaining students, through the fast track courses in mathematics, science and ICT in Years 7 and 8, and the opportunity to take A-level ICT in the main school. It was not possible to inspect provision for personal, social and health education fully because of the timetable, but work sampled was satisfactory. Tutorial periods are not making an effective contribution to the curriculum, and the school has plans to improve them. The curriculum makes good overall provision for students with special educational needs, chiefly through effective specialist teaching.
24. Enrichment and other opportunities for learning outside lessons are good. Many students are actively involved in lunch-time and after-school clubs, such as the jazz band, orchestra, table-tennis, the junior drama club and astronomy club. There is a very good range of sporting activities, including inter-school matches. Students make very good use of the Atlas Centre, which houses the library as well as extensive new ICT facilities before and after school. They are further supported in their studies by homework clubs and summer schools.
25. Staffing is satisfactory. Most subjects are well staffed with qualified and experienced teachers, but a weakness in staffing in design and technology is taking up too much time from senior staff, and the school is still recovering from some staffing difficulties in other subjects. The headteacher and senior managers pay close attention to staffing, and in particular to recruiting well qualified staff. Accommodation is satisfactory, and is improving as a result of a programme of refurbishment. However, some areas are cramped and congested at lesson change-overs and parts of the school are inaccessible to wheel-chair users. The school has a suitable access plan. The overall quality of resources for learning is good, and the Atlas Centre is well stocked with books. The librarian co-operates with teachers on purchasing, and manages the budget well. The resources of the Atlas Centre are very well used by the community and by other schools.

Sixth form

26. The sixth form offers a satisfactory range of AS and A-level courses, which fits well with other local provision. New courses are developed carefully to meet students' needs, and the vocational business studies course is successful. The general studies course, taken by all students in Year 12, does not make the contribution to key skills it is intended to make because the content is not planned in sufficient detail to meet the learning needs of different groups of students. Religious education is included in general studies, and there is no provision for students who do not take general studies in Year 13.
27. Activities outside lessons are satisfactory. Students take part in field trips and visits to local business organisations, industry and higher education institutions which enhance their coursework projects. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, including a pre-driving course and the engineering in education scheme. The resources of the Atlas Centre make a good contribution to the sixth form curriculum, and are well used.

Care, guidance and support

Overall provision for care, welfare, health and safety is good. Guidance to students on their work and personal development is satisfactory, and they have good opportunities to become involved in the school community and to take responsibility. Guidance to sixth form students is satisfactory, with good features in individual subjects.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for health and safety and child protection is well organised and effective.
- Heads of Year provide good personal guidance and support to students.
- Good relationships ensure a high standard of care for students.
- Well-organised support for students joining Year 7 gives them a good start to secondary school.
- School lunches are excellent.
- School librarians make an important contribution to personal support for students.
- Some tutorial periods are good, but many are not used effectively for day-to-day guidance.
- Students have good chances to share their ideas of how to improve the school and enhance their education.
- Sixth form students need more consistent guidance on the transition from GCSE to A-level work.

Commentary

28. Students are well cared for. First aid provision is good, and individual medical needs are known to all staff. Risk assessments are thorough and effective on the school site and for visits. Child protection provision meets the requirements of the local authority.

Example of outstanding practice

School lunch provides an excellent range of healthy food, with very good choice and variety. It is increasingly popular with students and is very effectively managed.

The catering manager organises all aspects of school lunch, and uses her knowledge of the local market and suppliers to source a wide range of healthy and interesting food at an economic price. Dishes are skilfully cooked and attractively presented, creating interest among the students in vegetable and salad dishes as

well as meats and deserts. Students told inspectors that they appreciated the choice, which included special dishes to celebrate festivals such as Chinese New Year, and the removal of machines selling expensive sugared drinks. Less healthy foods are being steadily reduced. The school has won the local authority Heart Beat award, and is regularly visited and consulted by other schools. The take-up of school meals has risen by 30 per cent since the school took control of its own catering.

29. Arrangements for guiding students are satisfactory, and have good features. Students form good, trusting relationships with adults, and know whom to turn to if they have problems. The quality of advice, support and guidance provided by most teachers ensures that students learn confidently. However, parents and students told inspectors that there were some lapses in this area, and a few examples of abrasive relationships were seen during the inspection. School librarians make a consistent and effective contribution to students' care and guidance through consistent personal support, and students receive good careers guidance. The quality of day-to-day guidance from tutors, however, is inconsistent, and many tutorial periods are not organised effectively. Students make a valuable contribution to their own support and guidance through the "Here to Help" scheme, in which trained volunteers help younger students.
30. There are good arrangements to welcome and support students new to the school, including a structured programme of special events and, increasingly, lessons taught in the Atlas Centre. Students quickly become part of the school community, and have opportunities to take responsibility. The school council is a very effective part of the school, with meetings attended by the chair of governors and headteacher. It operates in an atmosphere of frankness and respect, and students told inspectors they appreciated the opportunities it provided for them to contribute to decisions on important practical matters relating to school life.

Sixth form

31. Students have good information on the range of courses available in the school and in other schools and colleges. Teachers in almost all subjects ensure that students are fully qualified for the courses they undertake, and the school has recently tightened procedures to extend this to the minority of subjects that have accepted students with unrealistic starting points. Students receive good guidance from teachers on progress in their work, and there is an effective system of target grades. Progress towards these is monitored, and backed by mentoring support. Teachers in several subjects provide good individual support for learning outside lessons. There is an introductory course for students taking mathematics, but otherwise guidance on the transition from GCSE to A-level lacks consistency, so that a minority of students do not develop from the outset the patterns of study they need in order to do well.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has a good and productive partnership with other schools and the community. Its working relationship with parents is satisfactory, and has good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The work of the Atlas Centre inspires and promotes learning in other schools and the community.
- The school is making increasingly effective use of ICT for communication with parents.
- Annual reports to parents are clear and informative.

- Local businesses make an important contribution to work experience.
- A minority of parents and teachers do not check and sign homework planners.

Commentary

32. The school has a satisfactory working relationship with its parents. Most parents have a positive view of the school. They feel that children are happy and making good progress, and that the school is led and managed well. The overall quality of information for parents is good. The prospectus is well designed and informative, they receive all of the information they should in governors' annual reports, and reports on their children's progress are clearly written and informative. The school is making increasingly effective use of ICT to communicate with parents and keep them informed about their children's work and homework. Most parents felt that the system was working well, though a small minority felt that communications were not always answered. Inspectors found the system working well, and found that it was increasingly effectively used. A minority of parents and teachers do not support homework by checking and signing homework planners regularly. The gaps found in homework confirmed the concerns expressed by some parents before the inspection.
33. The school has strong links with the community, and with other schools and colleges. These are being very effectively developed through the mathematics and computing college. The school's facilities are used very well by a range of local primary and secondary schools and the local adult community college. Good links with primary schools help with continuity in learning for students joining Year 7. There are very good links with sports clubs, which offer coaching and specialist advice and support to students and students in the sixth form. This experience promotes a healthy life style and sport in the community. The school organises visits to a range of places of worship, and these prepare students well for living in multiracial community. The community makes a good contribution to careers education and to work experience.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and management. The leadership of other key staff is satisfactory. The overall effectiveness of management is good in the main school, and satisfactory in the sixth form. Governance is good; it is good, with very good features, in the main school, and satisfactory in the sixth form. Statutory requirements are not met for citizenship, for a daily act of collective worship, or for religious education for some students in Year 13.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides clear vision for the school and is developing management systems very effectively.
- The chair of governors makes an outstanding contribution to the school's leadership and direction.
- Senior managers and governors have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Teaching is closely monitored, with effective action to promote good teaching and to tackle weaknesses.
- Strategic planning is good in the main school, but underdeveloped in the sixth form.
- Provision for students' well-being, health and safety and care is very well managed.

- The introduction of the mathematics and computing college is being very well managed.
- Leadership and management are excellent in physical education, and very good in English and business studies.
- The management of provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT in the main school and sixth form needs further development.

Commentary

34. The headteacher has made important strategic decisions since joining the school just over a year before the inspection. Working closely with the chair of governors, he has formed a very clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and has set a clear direction, based on maximising strengths in ICT and on a continuous programme of improvement in teaching and management. The headteacher has reorganised the senior management team to match tasks well to the strengths of its members, and has strengthened it by effective new appointments. He has identified strengths and weaknesses in subjects, and made important changes in middle management. New appointments to staff and promotions have been well thought out and successful. Development planning is effective, with clear and appropriate priorities, though its complex layout does not always make these easy to follow. The school's status as a mathematics and computing college was quickly achieved, and its introduction is being very effectively managed. This is making an impact on some areas of weakness in these subjects, and has helped the school tackle an action point from its last inspection. The headteacher's very good leadership and management have established a clear pattern of improvement throughout the school, and this is widely recognised by staff and students.
35. The overall effectiveness of management is good in the main school. The senior management team is effective, and most middle management is of good quality, though there are weaknesses in the management of modern languages and in the co-ordination of the national strategy for Years 7 to 9. Provision for special educational needs is managed well, and provision for students' care and well-being is managed very well. Very good management in English and business studies, and excellent management in physical education, make a key contribution to standards and achievement, and to students' personal development. There is a good programme of induction for staff new to the school, and particularly for newly-qualified teachers, who receive very effective support from colleagues. The headteacher and senior managers give high priority to monitoring teaching and learning, and follow this up with effective action to promote good teaching and to tackle weaknesses. He and his colleagues were actively addressing the weaknesses found during the inspection.
36. Governance in the main school is good. It is strengthened by an outstanding contribution from the chair of governors, who is very well informed, devotes much time to her work, and co-operates closely with the headteacher in the strategic direction of the school. Governors are well organised, in touch, and fully involved in development planning and monitoring of the school's performance. The school's site, with a very small hall, makes the provision of a daily act of collective worship very difficult; some steps towards improving provision are planned when the new timetable is introduced in September. Governors are doing all they can to fulfil this statutory requirement and the breach is not affecting standards of students' personal development. Similarly, timetabling at present does not allow all aspects of citizenship to be covered thoroughly. Governors have taken action to fulfil this statutory requirement through the

new timetable for September, which will include more systematic provision for citizenship. These breaches do not affect the overall impact of governors' good work in the school.

37. Governors keep close and effective control of finances, and apply best value principles effectively in their decisions. They have played an important role in establishing the school's current climate of improvement. The school's spending per student is below average, and the standards reached and provision for students' care and personal development represent good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,131,380	Balance from previous year	47,035
Total expenditure	4,063,329	Balance carried forward to the next	115,086
Expenditure per student	3,253.27		

Sixth form

38. Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the head of the sixth form, and is carried out to a good standard. Provision in most subjects is managed well, with strengths, as in the main school, in English, business studies and physical education, where leadership and management are excellent. There are, however, significant weaknesses in the management of French, and in the organisation of general studies provision to contribute to students' key skills. The strategic contribution of senior managers and governors is satisfactory, but is less well developed than in the main school. Governors monitor sixth form standards effectively, and keep effective control of its finances. The viability of courses is kept under review, and steps are taken to ensure that students are qualified for the courses they undertake. Governors are not meeting the statutory requirement for religious education for those students in Year 13 who do not continue to take general studies. This may not have been clear to governors from the information available to them, and does not affect sixth form achievement. Strategic planning for the sixth form is not supported by an effective plan for its development, and this limits its effectiveness.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING (WRL)

Provision for work-related learning (WRL) is good. It meets statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The award-bearing flexible learning course for lower-attaining students is very effective.
- The school provides well-managed work experience for all Year 10 students.
- Careers guidance is well organised and effective.
- Courses are managed well, but there is no central co-ordination.

Commentary

39. The school provides a coherently planned WRL programme for all students in Years 10 and 11. The provision follows national, non-statutory guidance closely. It is enhanced by well-taught vocational courses in ICT, leisure and tourism, a thriving GCSE business studies course which recruits large numbers, and a work-related flexible learning course. This course is very well taught and is ideally suited to students for whom a normal GCSE timetable would not be appropriate. The course makes a considerable contribution to the students' personal and social development and keeps potentially vulnerable and disaffected students motivated and on track to full employment. Students with special educational needs are well supported and do well.
40. Careers provision supports WRL and is effective, with good use of the work of Connexions and a wide range of local partners. Each element of WRL is managed effectively, but its contribution to the work of the school could be improved by better central co-ordination. Overall, students have good knowledge and understanding of WRL issues.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and all groups of students achieve well.
- Comprehensive schemes of work meet the needs of all students.
- Teaching and learning are good, and a significant proportion of teaching is excellent.
- Marking and target setting show students what they need to learn in order to improve.
- A minority of lessons lack pace and challenge, and do not engage students' interest.
- Lower-attaining students do well by Year 11, but their writing in Year 9 is weak.
- There is some good work with ICT, but teachers have limited access to computer suites.

Commentary

41. Students join Year 7 with average standards for their age, and their overall achievement is good. 2004 GCSE results were above average in English and English literature, and the standard of Year 11 work during the inspection was also above average. This represents good achievement. Results in Year 9 national tests were broadly average in 2004, after falling for some years, partly as a result of staffing difficulties. The standard of work seen during the inspection was better, and was above average overall. Achievement in Year 9 is now good. Although girls do better than boys overall, the gap between them is small by Year 11. Students with special educational needs achieve well in English as a result of effective specialist teaching.
42. By the end of Year 9 students speak fluently in group and class discussions, and most read accurately and independently. They understand ideas and characters in literature. Higher-attaining students can read between the lines. The writing of average and higher-attaining students is organised, clear and correctly punctuated, but the work of lower attaining students is often untidy and poorly punctuated. By Year 11, students speak purposefully and organise their thoughts well. They can make personal responses to what they read. The writing of lower attaining students is beginning to be organised and clear. Lower attaining students achieve as well as their classmates because teachers provide carefully designed learning materials and tasks. Although schemes of work contain some exciting opportunities to extend computer skills, restricted access to computer rooms is limiting development.
43. The quality of teaching and learning in lessons ranges from satisfactory to excellent. It is good overall, and very good in Years 10 and 11. Students have good attitudes, and are quick to learn in lessons where teaching is directly related to their needs. For example, in an excellent Year 11 lesson on *Of Mice and Men* students were able to

explain the status of individuals in the novel and the distribution of power within the group of characters. In the most effective lessons, very good planning ensures that learning is enjoyable and students build successfully on previous work. Lesson aims are shared with students so that they know what will be assessed and can see the relevance of what they are doing. Consequently, students work well on their own and in collaboration with their classmates.

Example of outstanding practice

Challenge, encouragement and inspiration enabled all students in a Year 11 class to understand poetic techniques in depth and to apply this knowledge in drafting a sonnet.

Students responded warmly to their teacher's welcome, which set the tone for a very enjoyable lesson. The excellent relationship between the teacher and students ensured that they were all quickly involved, accepting responsibility for their own learning and working cooperatively with others. Attitudes and behaviour were admirable. The teacher's planning for and management of this excellent Year 11 poetry lesson enabled all of the class to create their own sonnet through a stimulating three-phase construction process. After reading and analysing the structure of a love poem by John Clare, the class were asked to speak about an object that demonstrated an aspect of their love. One boy explained that his house keys were a reminder of the people and place he loved most. Next the teacher used a PowerPoint presentation to model the construction of a sonnet. In the final phase, students were able to use the teacher's framework to make a first draft of their own poem. In an exciting conclusion to the lesson volunteers read their poems, received criticism and considered what the class had learned and needed to do next. By the end of the lesson students were able to explain the structure of a sonnet; they described how the poem's rhythm and rhyme influenced their choice of words. By the end of the lesson, all students had produced a first draft of a sonnet, often with good accuracy and expression.

44. Feedback to students on their work, and guidance on improving it, are of good quality and linked effectively with National Curriculum levels and examination grades. Teachers make good use of resources, including interactive whiteboards, and manage time well. Homework reinforces and extends learning in most classes. In a small number of less effective lessons, taught by unqualified and temporary teachers, teaching is dull and unimaginative, lacking pace and challenge, so that students are not interested in the work, and do not make sufficient progress. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly, with effective guidance to teachers on improving work.
45. Very good leadership and management have made a strong recent impact on the department, particularly in its teamwork. The new subject leader has developed very good lines of communication. She has delegated responsibilities to encourage colleagues to develop their strategic thinking and capacity to plan for improvement. Evaluation is embedded in the department's practice and is open, frank and accurate. Planning makes good use of national strategies. The department has made good overall progress since the last inspection, with strengths in teaching, provision for special educational needs, and achievement at Year 11.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

46. Provision is satisfactory, chiefly because of the interest taken by subject leaders and teachers in the use of language in their work. Speaking and listening are used effectively in most subjects, and teachers generally provide interesting and effective reading and writing tasks. Posters in many classrooms have raised students' awareness of the ways in which they can improve writing, spelling and punctuation. Provision in modern languages is, however, unsatisfactory, and central management has suffered from a very high turnover of staff. There has been limited training for teachers. Further improvement in the management and promotion of literacy is a key issue in raising standards further.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement have been seriously affected by recent staffing difficulties, and achievement is unsatisfactory.
- Students generally behave well in lessons and want to learn.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory in German, but unsatisfactory in French.
- Standards are below average to well below average in both languages.
- Teaching is not matched closely enough to the wide range of learning needs in each class.
- There are significant weaknesses in marking and in the assessment of progress.
- Despite some recent improvements, leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

47. French and German were inspected. Standards in both languages have been seriously affected by recent staffing difficulties. Achievement within individual lessons, especially in German, is sometimes good, but overall achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 9 and 11. In 2004, GCSE results in French were broadly average, but lower than those of other subjects at the school. In German they were well below average. Girls performed significantly better than boys. The standard of Year 11 work seen during the inspection was below average in both languages.
48. Teachers' assessments show broadly average standards at the end of Year 9. However, the standard of work seen in Year 9 during the inspection was below average in German and well below average in French. Some students seen during the inspection had been assessed as meeting or exceeding the nationally expected standard for Year 9 when they were still in the beginning stages of learning French. In both languages, the highest-attaining students can pick out gist and detail in what they read and hear. Very few speak with convincing accents or produce more than very short phrases or individual words in the foreign language. Too many students in Year 9 are in the earliest stages of learning French, and many have serious misconceptions about pronunciation, the French writing system, and the meaning of common expressions.
49. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in German but unsatisfactory in French. In the minority of lessons where teaching and learning are good, teachers have clear objectives, provide well-structured activities and use the foreign language frequently. The range of activities in most lessons, however, is too narrow. Students have too few opportunities to speak the foreign language, or to use ICT in their learning. Day-to-day assessment is sometimes very weak, and work is not matched effectively to the very wide range of learning needs in each class. The school has tackled problems of behaviour in the department well. Students are now almost always well behaved, and classrooms are orderly. The school's support has not, however, enabled teachers to focus effectively on tackling the significant gaps in students' learning caused by the staffing difficulties, and this is seriously limiting the effectiveness of teaching, particularly in French. There is one lunchtime languages club for Year 7 students and students have opportunities to visit France and Germany. However, there is too little day-to-day enrichment of learning beyond lessons.
50. The need to spend much energy on dealing with staffing problems has limited the effectiveness of leadership and management in other aspects of the department's work. Senior managers have also deployed advanced skills teachers to help with

classroom management, and this has improved behaviour. Nevertheless, leadership and management are not enabling the department to meet students' needs, and are unsatisfactory overall. The subject leader is aware of weaknesses in teaching and learning, and monitors the work of other teachers but effective action has not yet been taken to address these. In particular, the department as a whole is not working cohesively to match teaching to students' learning needs, and the subject's improvement plan is too large and unmanageable.

51. Provision has deteriorated significantly since the last inspection, partly as a result of staffing difficulties, and partly because teaching is not matched closely enough to students' learning needs. Standards have fallen, and there is still a large gap between boys' and girls' standards. Good features in teaching in the last report are now seen only in a minority of lessons, and weaknesses have not been effectively tackled. The good attitudes and behaviour of the students put the school in a position to improve on this situation, provided it can make the necessary improvements in teaching and learning.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Year 9 and Year 11, and there is good achievement in Year 9.
- Much teaching is good, but a significant minority of lessons are unsatisfactory.
- Gifted and talented students are not effectively challenged in all of their work.
- Assessment, marking and target setting make a good contribution to achievement.
- The most effective teaching methods are not shared effectively across the department.

Commentary

52. Results at GCSE and in Year 9 were above average in 2004. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average in Year 9, and broadly average in Year 11. Achievement is satisfactory overall, and work seen during the inspection showed good achievement in Year 9.
53. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. It is good in Years 7 to 9, and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. There is, however, a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching in individual lessons. Most lessons are well planned, though learning goals are not always clearly shared with students, leading to a lack of focus in some classes. Where teaching is good, teachers know the subject well, and have high expectations of students' work, behaviour and attitudes. These lessons have good pace, show clear continuity and progression in learning, and good relationships. This promotes good achievement, although in some lessons, higher-attaining students would learn more if they were more consistently challenged.
54. The main weaknesses in unsatisfactory teaching are poor explanation and communication, weak classroom management and poor relationships. Students in these lessons lose interest and learning and behaviour are unsatisfactory; the school is aware of the shortcomings and is taking action to tackle them. Support staff, when available, contribute well to the learning of students with special educational needs. Homework is set regularly and consolidates or extends classwork effectively. ICT is

effective when it is used, but the scope of this work is limited. Assessment procedures are good. Students have realistic targets and their progress is carefully monitored. Marking is good, and comments provide clear guidance for students on how to improve the standards of their work, which is generally well presented.

55. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is good teamwork and commitment to the vision of the department, and achievement is improving in Year 9. Organisation is good, and documentation identifies clear policies and practices. Teaching is monitored, but the most effective teaching methods are not shared effectively among all teachers. Gifted and talented students are identified, but provision for them is not systematic, so that they achieve less than they should in some lessons, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Accommodation and resources for learning are good, though more work is needed on developing the use of ICT. Students take part in the UK Mathematics Challenge, and have opportunities to attend revision and bridging classes.
56. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. Lower-attaining students receive more support and make greater progress. Analysis of data on students' performance enables the department to set targets and monitor progress. Performance management has provided some basis for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. The contribution of ICT to teaching and learning in mathematics has not, however, been effectively thought through.

Mathematics across the curriculum

57. The support for numeracy in other subjects is satisfactory. Teachers in most subjects identify areas where mathematics can contribute to learning. There are opportunities to use scale drawings and make accurate measurements in art and design, to analyse questionnaire data in technology, and to produce graphs and interpret data in science and geography. A school policy for numeracy is being developed, but is not yet in place.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising as a consequence of constant improvements to provision.
- Good teaching and learning across the school is a key factor in students' achieving well.
- Two groups of fast track students in Years 7 and 8 are achieving very well.
- Assessment is good but students are insufficiently involved in assessing their own progress.
- ICT is used well to support teaching but the use by students could be further strengthened.
- Good leadership and management have built strong teamwork and an effective curriculum.

Commentary

58. Achievement in science is good, and very good in the new fast track course in Years 7 and 8. In 2004, results at GCSE and in Year 9 national tests were above average, with a good improvement in Year 9 tests from 2003 results. Higher attaining students in Years 7 and 8 complete their pre-GCSE work in two rather than three years. These groups are taught very well, and are making rapid progress. Standards in work seen during the inspection were above average in Years 9 and 11. Boys do a little better than girls in Year 9, but boys and girls reach very similar standards by Year 11. There is a clear trend of rising standards in the department.
59. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers know the subject well, and make good use of techniques from the national strategy for Years 7 to 9. Where teaching is very good, learning goals are sharply defined and explained very clearly, so that students have a crystal-clear overview of what to do and the standard of work expected. In a minority of lessons, slight weaknesses in planning and in practical aspects of the work lead to less effective learning, though progress remains satisfactory. Good information from a range of sources gives teachers a clear idea of how well each student is doing. This is used well to help pitch work at a challenging level and address any weaknesses in learning. Students know their test scores, especially at GCSE, and this is a spur to learning. However, students are not involved sharply enough in pinpointing their achievements and identifying what they need to do to improve. Teachers make good use of ICT, including multi-media presentations, computer linked sensors and electronic display boards. All students have access to good study and revision materials on the school website.
60. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader has built an effective team, and keeps the department fully abreast of innovations in the curriculum. There are good arrangements to take account of students' views. The subject has made good improvements since the last inspection in its curriculum, teaching and achievement. It is very well placed to improve further.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Appropriate courses are provided for all students, with A-level courses for gifted students.
- Boys achieve significantly less well than girls.
- Weaknesses in the management of some classes, and in the use of assessment, are holding back progress.
- ICT is playing an important role in developing teaching and learning, and the Atlas Centre is successful.
- Very effective management of the specialist college is developing relationships with other schools and the community.
- The use of ICT in some subjects requires substantial development.

Commentary

61. Standards are broadly average in Year 9, and average overall, with some above average work, in Year 11. Teachers' assessments for 2004 showed only half of Year 9

students working at the nationally expected Level 5, but work seen during the inspection was better. Most students were reaching the nationally expected standard, and teachers were making good use of the national strategy for Years 7 to 9. GCSE results are broadly average, though they have been affected by staffing difficulties in some classes. The range of courses has now been extended to include a vocational course (GNVQ) in Years 10 and 11, and opportunities for the highest-attaining students to take A-level in Years 10 and 11. Achievement in these courses is good, but a minority of students in Years 10 and 11 do not have the commitment needed to work towards an assessment. Overall, achievement is satisfactory in Year 9 and Year 11, and very good for students taking A-level in Year 11.

62. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are often good, but some lessons have weaknesses. Work is carefully planned throughout the year in all courses. Teachers are making full use of the resources and the teaching methods suggested by the national strategy, with clearly structured lessons and a good range of learning activities. Most classes are managed well, leading to good relationships and a purposeful working atmosphere. In a significant minority, weak class management results in a slow start and an undercurrent of misbehaviour, with students talking when they should be listening to the teacher and becoming distracted from the work they are set.
63. Students' work is marked and assessed well, and they have satisfactory guidance on how to improve it. Students taking GNVQ have a detailed assessment scheme that informs them at every stage of the standard they have reached and their progress towards their targets. For many students this is motivating. Assessment in the A-level course in Years 10 and 11 is also very good
64. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and recently appointed senior managers have placed ICT at the heart of the school's development, and have extended the range of courses to provide good opportunities for all students to gain a qualification. Teaching is monitored, and effective action is taken to deal with weaknesses. However, current management initiatives are of recent origin, and they have not yet led to consistently good teaching and learning in all classes. ICT had significant weaknesses at the time of the last inspection. Overall improvement has been satisfactory, with very good recent improvement in facilities. The school is in a very good position to improve further.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

65. Provision is satisfactory, and improving. Teachers in roughly half of all subjects are making good use of ICT in teaching and learning. These include science, and there is good use of available ICT facilities in English. The use of ICT in the remaining subjects is satisfactory except for modern languages and art and design, where it is used too little. The school website is making an effective and growing contribution to learning, though its potential is not yet fully used in all subjects. Extending and improving the use of ICT is a major priority for the headteacher and senior managers.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good and GCSE results are rising.
- Teachers know the subject in detail and teach it well. They have high expectations of their students.
- Students' work is marked regularly and well, and tests are used effectively to track progress.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Fieldwork at Swanage makes a particularly good contribution to learning and achievement at GCSE.

Commentary

66. Achievement is good. Students join the school with below average geographical skills and knowledge, and reach above average standards by Year 9. GCSE results have been average in recent years, and show an upward trend, apart from a dip in 2003. The standard of work in Year 11 was towards the top of the average range, and above average in fieldwork. It represents good achievement among students choosing the subject. Students with special educational needs receive very limited additional support, but achieve well as a result of learning activities that are well matched to their needs.
67. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good, and very good in some lessons. Teachers know the subject well and have a committed approach to their students. Lessons are well structured, making good use of techniques from national strategies, and teachers use a good range of resources and activities to interest and involve students. Rooms with well-presented displays of students' work, geographical features and information provide a very good learning environment. There are, however, limited facilities for students to use ICT for learning and research. Most students settle quickly, work hard, cooperate sensibly and obviously enjoy the lessons. Students' class and homework are marked regularly in a way that helps them to improve. Tests are used effectively to assess students' knowledge and skill development in Years 7 to 9.
68. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader has a vision for the future development of the subject and provides a good model for both staff and students. He has a committed staff who work well together. In Year 10, students visit Swanage to study the physical and human features of the area, giving them the opportunity to develop, practise and test their geographical knowledge, understanding and skills. Students value the experience and are motivated by it and this is reflected in the standard of their coursework. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Strengths identified in the report have been built on and the areas for improvement addressed.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Strong leadership and good management are raising standards.
- Teaching, learning and assessment in Years 7 to 9 are good.

- Students' attitudes towards their learning are good.
- Independent learning is supported by excellent ICT and library resources.
- Work in some lessons needs to be more closely adapted to the needs of students.

Commentary

69. Standards are above average in Year 9, and this represents good achievement. Students achieve well because of good specialist teaching, effective systems of assessment and a strong focus on improving literacy. Standards in Year 11 are average and achievement is satisfactory. GCSE results in 2004 were significantly below average, but effective action has been taken to improve standards. At the inspection, there was a stronger focus on examination technique and students were provided with more opportunities to play an active role in their learning. Work was also more closely matched to the needs of the lower-attaining students. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys and girls, or of different groups of students.
70. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall; it is good in Years 7 to 9, and satisfactory with good features in Years 10 and 11. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations and encourage students to work independently and collaboratively. Students are motivated because teachers employ a wide range of stimulating teaching methods and provide helpful advice on how they can make further progress. Where teaching is less effective, assignments lack real challenge and are insufficiently adapted to the learning needs of individuals. Students become less motivated because they are not fully extended and do not know how to improve their work. Teachers' use of guided writing structures and help with specialist vocabulary gives most students the confidence and skills to write more extended pieces of work. Support for literacy is most effective in Years 7 to 9. Teachers encourage students to use the school's excellent computer and library facilities at lunch times and after school. This is helping to improve standards.
71. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear vision for improvement and a strong team spirit. Monitoring and self-evaluation are strong. The department is fully aware of the steps required to raise standards further. Resources are well managed and new technology is very well used in the classroom. There has been an increased focus on independent learning, and there is a close working relationship with the librarian in the new Atlas Centre. The department has made good progress since the last inspection, especially in the effective use of ICT.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning enable students to achieve well from a below average starting point.
- Standards in the full GCSE course are above average, and students achieve well.
- The subject makes a good contribution to language and literacy skills, and to personal development.
- Leadership and management are good, and provide effective support for non-specialist teachers.

- The introduction of examination courses for all students in Years 10 and 11 promotes good achievement.

Commentary

72. Students join the school with below average standards. They make good progress to reach broadly average standards in Year 9 and Year 11, with above average standards among the minority who take the full GCSE course. Results in the GCSE short course, taken by all other students, are below average. By Year 9, students have a sound knowledge of major world faiths and can discuss and write about religious concepts with some degree of confidence. Students in Years 10 and 11 bring the teachings of Christianity and Islam to bear on a range of moral and social issues. Those taking full GCSE have a particularly detailed knowledge of Islam. Overall, achievement from students' starting points is good.
73. Teaching, learning and students' attitudes are good. Most teachers know the subject well, and there is good support for non-specialists through detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. This ensures consistently good planning and teaching techniques, and teachers manage classes well. Students are effectively challenged, become interested in their work, and make good progress. Their work is marked thoroughly. Teachers assess the GCSE work well, and are working to overcome the lack of national benchmarks for standards in Years 7 to 9. Although all students tend to be set similar tasks, teachers support those with special educational needs, so that they are able to achieve as well as the others.
74. Leadership and management are good, and the acting subject leader is well supported by her colleagues. Examination results are carefully analysed, and self-evaluation is good. The specialist religious education rooms are well resourced and ICT is used well. Students are encouraged to use the new technology in their presentations, as well as using computers for their written work and for research. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Teaching, learning and achievement have improved, and the new GCSE short course has enhanced the provision significantly.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in graphic products have improved steadily and are now above the school and national averages.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good and the department meets the needs of all students.
- ICT is making an increasing contribution to learning, but computer-aided-manufacture is less well developed.
- Drawing, designing and the development of ideas need more systematic development.
- Continuity is hampered for some groups because of a shortage of specialist teachers.

Commentary

75. Standards are broadly average in Year 9 and Year 11. All students, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in line with their ability because they are well supported in lessons. GCSE results are also broadly average, with above average standards in graphic products, but weaker results in food technology. Girls do better than boys at GCSE, and in 2004, boys were not doing as well in design and technology as in their other subjects. Students begin with broadly average starting points, and their achievement is satisfactory.
76. From Years 7 to 9 students build their basic making skills and learn to design through a broad range of interesting projects and achievement is satisfactory. Most students enjoy design and technology. Common features, including drawing, designing and the development of ideas are not firmly established across all areas. Students therefore do not always recognise and use knowledge and skills acquired in earlier work to inform increasingly more demanding design and make activities in new situations. Rates of improvement are further slowed for some groups because there are insufficient specialist teachers to meet timetable requirements. There is marked improvement in students work in Years 10 and 11. Higher-attaining students consolidate and extend their skills through good research, organisation and evaluation, and produce design portfolios of a good standard. Students develop skills in evaluating their final product but do not make enough use of design folders to inform and record modifications during the process of manufacture.
77. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and occasionally good. Lessons where teaching was satisfactory had some good features, but the focus for the lesson is directed towards completing a task rather than developing students' underlying skills and understanding. Where teaching is good, lessons are well organised, and students understand what is expected of them, with clear deadlines. Here teachers positively discourage colourful clutter or embellishment of design sheets at the expense of developing understanding. Teachers provide high levels of individual help to students, and have good skills in managing classes. The impact of ICT, used as a tool for research, drawing and presentation of work is beginning to show in standards of work. Computer aided manufacturing, however, is weak.
78. Leadership is good. The subject leader has vision for the development of the subject and, since his appointment, has developed a strong sense of teamwork in the department. Management is satisfactory. It has some good elements, but too much time and energy is devoted to the daily organisation and support of supply and or non-specialist teachers. Issues for improvement are identified well in develop planning, but progress towards tackling them is not tracked in sufficient detail. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, and resources and accommodation have improved significantly. The subject leader played an important part in designing refurbished accommodation. The department is beginning to make a positive contribution to the schools specialist status and is well placed to improve further.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design and music were inspected fully, and drama was sampled. Teaching and learning sampled in drama ranged in quality from satisfactory to excellent, and were good overall. Where the teaching was satisfactory, activities were well planned, but there were some weaknesses in managing the class, leading to a lack of focus among some students. Students have very good opportunities to evaluate their own and each other's work, and to examine complex social and moral issues such as the impact of human activity on the environment. .

Example of outstanding practice

Students entered the drama studio in a well-trained and pleasant manner. Their teacher's established registration routine consolidated the calm, controlled atmosphere. Then the teacher skilfully challenged the class with a stimulating warm up that prepared them for rehearsal and presentation of their plays. The teacher's quick-fire technique ensured attention and encouraged competition to answer questions. She rewarded and encouraged appropriate responses with praise. Careful arrangement of students in supportive groups ensured that the whole class benefited from the lesson. During rehearsal the teacher's advice and direction helped students to develop ideas, and overcome problems. Consequently, self, peer and teacher assessment enable students to improve their own and others' performance. The teacher's superb modelling of freeze-frame enabled students to compare and contrast their own performance with that of an expert. Students applied creative and physical effort unstintingly because they were challenged and stimulated. The final presentation and review session allowed students to deliver their pieces and receive criticism from their teacher and classmates. By the end of the lesson students showed that they could work collaboratively to shape, refine and analyse presentations.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are well planned, with activities that students enjoy.
- Teachers have high expectations of accurate observational drawing.
- Students' work is accurately assessed, and there are good targets for GCSE students.
- Leadership has a clear programme for improving standards.
- Non-specialist teaching leads to unsatisfactory progress in some lessons.

Commentary

79. Students join the school with average standards, and standards remain broadly average overall in Year 9 and at GCSE, though girls' GCSE results are better than boys'. The standard of work seen during the inspection was also broadly average overall in Year 9 and Year 11, but had good features, indicating that standards are improving. Overall, achievement is satisfactory.
80. Teaching is satisfactory, with some good teaching in Years 10 and 11. Teachers give good practical demonstration of skills and techniques, and students develop good pencil skills and accurate observation in drawing. They benefit from working directly from ambitious groups of objects, natural forms and portraits. They learn to use light and shade, texture, and colour well, with a range of media. Students learn to develop work into prints and larger scale, strong compositions in bold colour; activities which they clearly enjoy. Homework is used well to extend classwork; all students are set a variety of demanding tasks that are set out in a well-planned booklet. These homework tasks, and those set in class, build learning progressively in clearly defined incremental steps. Students learn effectively about a range of artists' work and about artefacts from different cultures. They have learnt how to research effectively, especially at GCSE, and how to use preparation to satisfy the examination objectives well. Students in Year 11 have tutorial style interviews where achievable targets are set to ensure that all students reach their potential. There are a number of supportive measures that teachers take to address concerns about underachievement, especially with boys.
81. There is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching by non-specialists. This results in a lack of challenge to students and some lapses in behaviour. Across the department, there is too little use of ICT for teaching and learning. The assessment of students' work is good. Evaluative comments tell students what they have to do to improve. Homework is used well, and students receive good feedback on it. However, students have too few opportunities to evaluate their own work and reflect on what they have learned.
82. Subject leadership is good, and there is effective teamwork. The newly appointed subject leader has rewritten schemes of work and improved development planning. Management is satisfactory. Standards are moderated and there is some monitoring of teaching, though some non-specialist staff do not have enough guidance in planning work. High quality art displays round the school celebrate achievement. Overall, the subject's improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, and it is well placed to improve further.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Year 11, and overall achievement is good.
- Good teaching generates positive attitudes among students, who are willing to work hard.
- Music lessons offer good opportunities to students of all abilities and aptitudes.
- Some of the benefits of the teaching are lost through weaknesses in marking.
- The department is led and managed well, with effective support for new teachers.

Commentary

83. No students took A-level in 2004. The standard of work seen during the inspection was broadly average in Year 9 and above average in Year 11. This represents good achievement, since many students enter Year 7 with few musical skills. Teaching is well matched to the needs of the full range of students, so that all achieve well. Musical events and shows take place in school and in the community. The choir is held in high esteem and has performed regularly in the Royal Albert Hall. These activities contribute well towards students' personal development and provide good opportunities for talented musicians.
84. Teaching and learning are good overall throughout the school, and very good in Years 10 and 11. Most lessons are well planned, with interesting topics that motivate and enthuse students. Consequently they become engrossed in their work and are anxious to do well. Teachers cover a good range of topics in lessons, and all students have good opportunities to try out ideas in composition and to perform them to the class. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is well matched to examination requirements. In a minority of lessons, planning offers too little variety, and students find it difficult to sustain concentration for the whole of the lesson. Work is assessed regularly, and students know their predicted grades and what to do to improve. Students receive positive day-to-day feedback on their work, but written work is not always effectively marked. All students use music software confidently for sequencing and editing their compositions. A number of students learning instruments have reached higher grades in examinations, and this benefits their GCSE coursework.
85. The subject leader provides good leadership, and the profile of music within the school is improving. There is very effective support for new teachers. Management is satisfactory, and schemes of work are being revised to take clearer account of National Curriculum levels. The subject has shown good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in GCSE results and in the numbers of students choosing music at GCSE. The school is in a very good position to make further improvements.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well in the National Curriculum and at GCSE.
- Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school, and have excellent features.
- Students enjoy their lessons, work hard and behave very well.
- Provision for enrichment beyond lessons is very good, and many students take part.
- Excellent leadership and management have created a strong trend of improvement.

Commentary

86. Students join Year 7 with below average standards for their age, and make very good progress to reach above average standards by Year 9. GCSE results were just above average in 2004. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average in non-examination classes and well above average in GCSE classes. Achievement is very good among all groups of students.
87. Teaching and learning are very good overall, and there is much excellence in theoretical and practical work. Teachers throughout the school plan effective lessons that generate enthusiasm among all groups of students, develop their skills very effectively and ensure that they are fully exercised. Literacy and numeracy are used appropriately to enrich learning; key words are identified and shared with students. The use of ICT is good.

Example of outstanding practice

A Year 10 class achieved well above average standards in basketball because they were taught in carefully planned groups by a teacher with exceptionally high expectations and dynamic rigour.

From the start of the lesson, students showed responsibility for their own learning leading their own warm up. The teacher skilfully challenged them to develop their own dribbling and shooting skills, apply the improved skills to a small game situation and evaluate and improve their own and others' performance. Attitudes and behaviour were exemplary and reflected the very high expectations of the teacher. Careful grouping of students according to their learning needs and levels of skill helped all students to work at maximum capacity throughout the lesson showing determination to improve and relishing the rigorous pace. Excellent discipline twinned with a sense of humour and acute awareness of what each student needed to do to improve contributed to the very positive climate for improvement. All students achieved standards well above those normally seen because they were taught in ability groups and they were all striving to improve. They were able to show improved precision, control, fluency and speed in their own performance and identify how they had achieved this. A student with special educational needs made the same progress as others in the class. He was selected to demonstrate dribbling and passing in a variety of ways, and did so very well.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent subject knowledge and varied learning styles enabled students in a GCSE theory group to make impressive gains in their knowledge and understanding of sport and media.

Very good relationships and the teacher's enthusiasm shone during the lesson. Conducting the lesson at a brisk pace, the teacher showed a very good grasp of the needs of each student and challenged them consistently and sensitively through the use of very effective questioning. This inspired students to perceive and understand new a wide range of issues concerning media and sport. Literacy skills were used very well. Group discussions, video snippets and variety of contrasting current newspaper articles were used well to help students deepen their knowledge and understanding of media and sport. By the end of the lesson students were able to analyse the impact of the media skilfully and show a very good understanding of different types of coverage. Learning was reinforced by a group task which the students thoroughly enjoyed. A student with special educational needs was inspired to lead her group in the initial draft.

88. Provision for learning outside lessons is very good and roughly a third of students regularly take part in it. They achieve very well in local and district inter-school competitions and fixtures. The Year 7 hockey team recently won Essex county championships. Students enjoy the lunch-time clubs and seize the opportunity to play badminton, table tennis as well as volley ball and five-a side football. There are some opportunities for dance but this area of activity is less well developed.
89. Leadership and management are excellent. The subject is superbly led by two very experienced teachers who inspire and lead by example. Consequently, standards of teaching are consistently high from all members of the department who all work towards common goals. Expectations of behaviour and levels of commitment are crystal clear for all students, who respond enthusiastically to the high standards set by all teachers. This excellent leadership and the hard work of all teachers and students have led to very good improvement since the last inspection.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business and vocational education was sampled. The successful GNVQ ICT course is reported above.

90. The flexible learning vocational course, ASDAN, is very well organised and highly successful. Teachers have adapted the framework of this course very effectively to meet the needs of the students taking it. Teaching is well planned, and very well carried out, leading to very good relationships the successful learning. The course makes an important contribution to these students' opportunities to take part in education.
91. The school provides a popular course in GCSE Business Studies, for which results in 2004 were well above average. A Year 10 lesson was observed in which students were studying the effects of different leadership styles in business organisations. In response to imaginative and very effective teaching, they were producing oral and written work of high quality and making very good progress.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

92. No teaching of these subjects took place during the inspection. Both were therefore sampled by discussing work with students and teachers, and analysis of written work. Sampling of **personal, social and health education** indicated that the course makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal development, but that there is very little time for it. Some tutorial periods during the inspection made a useful contribution, but many did not.
93. Work sampled in **citizenship** showed that there is too little provision to meet statutory requirements. There is too little time to ensure that all aspects of the National Curriculum are covered effectively; and discussion with students indicated that they had less knowledge and understanding of some aspects of citizenship than was expected for their age. There is no consistent programme of written work, and there are weaknesses in planning and assessment. Elements of citizenship provided in subjects are not effectively co-ordinated and identified as citizenship. There are, on the other hand, many opportunities for active participation in citizenship. The school council is well organised and effective. Students are active in charitable work, and willingly accept responsibility. The recently-appointed co-ordinator has a clear understanding of the subject, and provision is to be improved following the introduction of a new timetable in September. Planning and schemes of work to support this were being prepared during the inspection.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 11 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.

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	6	66.7	78.3	0	21.6	18.3	28.5
Biology	6	50.0	63.5	0	10.4	11.7	19.8
Business Studies	4	100	75.3	50.0	15.4	37.5	25.7
Chemistry	2	0	70.3	0	13.2	0	23.0
Communication Studies	4	100	87.2	0	24.9	32.5	32.8
English Literature	5	100	85.3	0	16.1	30.0	29.0
French	3	0	79.8	0	19.4	0	28.2
Design and technology	3	0	72.6	0	13.9	0	24.3
General Studies	27	48.1	73.6	14.8	16.9	16.7	25.5
Geography	2	100	75.5	50.0	24.4	45.0	27.0
German	1	0	81.6	0	18.9	0	28.8
Information technology	4	50.0	96.3	0	25.7	10.0	20.6
Mathematics	1	0	96.8	0	56.6	0	20.5
Other social studies	19	63.2	67.8	5.3	15.1	18.4	23.2
Religious studies	5	20.0	82.2	20.0	26.1	10.0	31.2
Sociology	2	100	72.1	50.0	19.6	40.0	25.9
Sport/PE studies	1	0	72.2	0	11.8	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	7	100	98.3	0	50.2	62.9	87.1
Biology	3	100	96.6	0	40.0	66.7	79.3
Business Studies	10	100	98.9	40.0	39.4	76.0	81.8
Chemistry	3	100	85.7	33.3	50.0	73.3	85.7
Communication Studies	13	100	97.7	53.8	50.0	93.8	85.7
Drama	8	100	99.6	62.5	42.8	92.5	85.1
English Literature	17	100	99.4	17.6	44.9	77.6	85.5
French	1	100	98.8	100	46.4	60.0	85.2
Design and technology	10	100	97.8	20	35.0	64.0	77.9
General studies	42	85.7	94.9	4.8	30.5	54.8	72.9
Geography	3	100	98.8	33.3	46.4	93.3	85.2
German	1	100	98.6	0	49.6	40.0	86.3
History	4	100	99.0	50.0	20.8	85.0	85.1
Information technology	20	100	96.3	15.0	8.8	59.0	71.1
Mathematics	5	100	96.8	0	14.1	44.0	89.5
Music	2	100	98.2	0	37.1	50.0	79.5
Other social studies	32	96.9	97.4	18.8	42.5	70.0	81.6
Physics	4	50	96.7	0	45.3	25.0	81.6
Religious studies	5	100	99.1	60.0	49.5	88.0	87.4
Sociology	15	86.7	98.5	20.0	45.3	66.7	84.6
Sports/PE studies	11	100	97.8	45.5	30.9	89.1	75.4

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students reach broadly average standards and achieve well from their GCSE results.
- Teaching is good, with very good features, and standards are closely tracked.
- Very good leadership and management have created an effective team of teachers.
- The number of students studying English literature has increased.

Commentary

94. In 2004 AS Level results were average, though no students gained grades A or B. A-level results were below average because of the low number of A and B grades, but all students passed. The standard of work seen during the inspection was broadly average, and represented good achievement from these students. Overall, achievement in the subject is now good.
95. By Year 13 students are confident in their knowledge of the texts they study and produce substantial folders of notes and essays. They research and plan written work carefully so that the lines of argument are clear and supported by textual evidence. Students are very positive in class. They express their viewpoints and ideas clearly. In Year 12, students make good progress in developing analytical skills in lessons and are beginning to transfer these skills to their written work. For example, in a very good lesson on Dracula students were able to identify the key features of the gothic novel and comment on the ways in which the author used language.
96. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are enthusiastic and conduct lessons at a brisk pace. They plan lessons carefully to ensure that activities are varied and that students are fully engaged. Challenge and high expectations are features in all lessons, and as a result students make good progress in improving their analytical skills. Learning is highly interactive, with many opportunities for well-structured small group and whole class discussion. Students are expected to work independently through research as well as through their note-taking and written assignments. Students of all abilities carry out their essay work with interest and enjoyment. Assessment is very thorough and closely tracks students' progress. Target setting is very effective. Marking is detailed and gives all students clear indications about the standard of their work and shows them how to improve further.
97. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader has brought the most out of teachers' skills, and created an effective team who share her sense of purpose and high aspirations. Teachers work well with one another to provide a coherent programme for learning. They ensure that students have a clear overview of examination requirements. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Until 2004, English classes were small, but there are now 31 students in Year 12. A review of the sixth form curriculum is underway, and an English language course is

planned to attract more students. Sixth form provision was not reported on in detail at the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

98. Provision is satisfactory. Standards of literacy are average, and students speak competently and work well together in groups. In several subjects well-structured assignments provide valuable support for developing students' reading. Most students have sufficient skills in literacy to meet the requirements of their subjects, but there are weaknesses in history among some lower-attaining students and in modern languages. The management of provision is not, however, systematic, and additional provision in general studies is not making an effective contribution to literacy in Year 12.

French

Provision in French is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are very low, and achievement is unsatisfactory. There is no Year 13 class.
- Students have too little understanding of French grammar, and speak with strong English accents.
- Students do not know clearly how well they are doing and often have unrealistic expectations.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory, and too many teachers teach the same class.
- Students' attitudes are good; they are keen to learn.

Commentary

99. Numbers taking French have been very small in recent years, but the current Year 12 group is viable, with twelve students. None of the three students taking AS in 2004 achieved a graded result or proceeded to Year 13. Standards in Year 12 are well below average. Students can pick out gist meaning in printed texts of AS standard, but they do not show detailed understanding. They rely on recognising individual words rather than using grammatical knowledge. They are hesitant when speaking French and most have very anglicised accents. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory, and the lack of continuity in teaching means that students are not progressing in a structured and systematic way towards meeting the demands of the examinations.
100. Teaching and learning are good in some individual lessons, but unsatisfactory overall. Where teaching is good, teachers plan well-sequenced activities which allow students to progress effectively. In other lessons the work is not appropriately matched to the needs of the students or the demands of the examinations. Students' contributions in French are limited to individual words or short phrases. Teachers do not use assessment information to tailor teaching to the needs of students or to make clear to them how well or badly they are doing, so that some students have unrealistic expectations. Students have individual short-term targets but these are often vague and do not promote high standards. Students have good attitudes, however, and are very willing to learn. Male and female students show equal engagement in their work.

101. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Serious staffing problems have diverted teachers' attention from taking action against perceived weaknesses, and poor organisation results in four teachers sharing one class. Although policies are in place – on using assessment effectively to raise standards, for example – these are not reflected in what actually goes on. Planning for improvement is over-complex and unmanageable. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory. At the last inspection the best students were described as 'confident speakers'. This is not now the case: speaking is one of the weakest aspects of the students' work.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have a good command of the subject, and match work well to students' needs.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning and relationships are good.
- Teachers provide good support and enable students to work in a relaxed and purposeful atmosphere.
- Teaching styles do not sufficiently encourage independent learning.
- Students are not given enough opportunities to use ICT.

Commentary

102. A-level and AS results in 2003 and 2004 were below average, but achievement was satisfactory in view of students' GCSE results. The standard of work seen during the inspection was also below average, and represents satisfactory achievement. Most students have good algebraic skills and collaborate well to produce accurate results. They can apply mathematical knowledge well and are confident and articulate in discussions. Students' overall needs are well met, particularly those with modest GCSE grades.

103. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan well and use good subject knowledge to promote class discussions. Lessons are brisk and purposeful and students respond positively. Expectations are high and relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students appreciate the additional support they receive from teachers outside lessons. There are, however, few opportunities for students to use ICT, to develop investigative skills or learn independently; in some lessons, teachers do too much of the work. Written work is well presented and study notes will provide a valuable source for examination revision.

104. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The AS and A-Level courses are well planned and managed. Staff work well together as a committed team. There is sound tracking and recording of achievement, and transition from GCSE to AS-level is managed well. Some monitoring of teaching takes place and the head of department has some understanding of the strengths in colleagues' teaching. However monitoring processes are not sufficiently rigorous to improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the department. Sixth form provision was not reported on in detail at the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

105. Provision is satisfactory. Teachers in several subjects make a significant contribution to developing numeracy skills, and there is good work in business studies where financial calculations and forecasts are regularly undertaken and skills well applied. However, work is not co-ordinated effectively across subjects, and the contribution of general studies is underdeveloped.

SCIENCE

Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been an improvement in A-level results over the last three years, but AS results remain weak.
- Teaching is good, but some of the benefits are lost by weak assessment.
- Students do not receive sufficient guidance on the transition from GCSE to A-level.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and committed, and most students have very good attitudes.

Commentary

106. A-level results have improved from well below average in 2002 to below average in 2004. AS results, however, remained well below average in 2004 and do not show the same trend of improvement as the A-level results. The number of students taking these examinations was small. The standard of work seen during the inspection showed improvement from these results, and was broadly average overall. There is no significant difference between the attainment of male and female students, and current achievement is satisfactory.
107. Students in Year 12 have good understanding of some aspects of the subject, but their knowledge is not consistent. For example, students have good understanding of some biological molecules, but not of others, and their knowledge and understanding of basic principles, such as the transport of substances across membranes, lacks depth. There is a similar pattern in Year 13, where students are reaching average standards, but are not developing their knowledge, skills and understanding to the level required for the highest grades. Students make good use of the internet to download notes and to study research techniques.
108. Recent changes to teaching, including the introduction of pre-lesson reading assignments, have had an important impact on teaching, and its overall quality is now good. Teachers know the subject well, manage classes effectively and foster good relationships. In one lesson, very good planning, a pre-lesson assignment, and effective use of ICT and a video clip led to very good learning and achievement. Assessment and tracking of progress are satisfactory, but information from assessment is not used sufficiently to match work to students' learning needs. Analysis of their work over the year showed that they have sometimes focused too much on information rather than on the analysis of concepts and processes, and that they are not consistently applying their knowledge to new situations. Overall, learning is satisfactory, with good learning in lessons as a result of the current good teaching.

109. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The subject leader is enthusiastic and leads a team of committed specialists. The department has evaluated its curriculum to make it more relevant to students, but this process needs to be taken further, and guidance on the transition to A-level made more systematic. The subject was not reported on in detail at the last inspection.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Increasing numbers of more able students take the subject, and standards in Year 12 are rising.
- Higher-attaining students work hard, but some other students do not take enough care over their work.
- There are insufficient opportunities for independent work.
- Lower attaining students sometimes often lack confidence and struggle in their learning.
- Students value the extra support teachers give, but some need more structured support.

Commentary

110. Small numbers of students (three in 2004) have taken A-level in recent years. This means that the results of a single year lack statistical significance as too much depends on the standards of the individual students when they start the course. Collectively, the A-level results over recent years have been below average. The standard of work seen in Year 13, where there are eight students, is below average. Many underachieved at AS level as some lacked confidence or did not appreciate the demands of the course. Some have persevered and made up some lost ground. On the other hand, some higher-attaining students have consistently worked well and have sustained very high standards. Most understand what chemicals are needed to make a common set of brightly coloured dyes but only the most proficient could readily write down the chemical equation for such reactions. Overall, achievement by the end of Year 13 is satisfactory.
111. Current standards in Year 12 are average. The fourteen students taking the course have higher starting grades with a good number having two “A” grades in their GCSE science course. They have risen well to their new challenge and have a good work ethic. Consequently achievement is satisfactory. In class they are keen to ask questions. Many are showing improving competence in using chemical nomenclature, drawing the structure of molecules and understanding why certain combinations of atoms react as they do.
112. Teaching and the pace and variety of learning are satisfactory, with good features. Teachers know the subject in detail and make effective use of the good resources which have been built up. The course is well structured and there is a good emphasis on the social, environmental and industrial applications of chemistry. Teaching and learning are closely linked to examination requirements. This ensures satisfactory learning, but also limits the challenge of teaching and its match to the needs of the wide range of students in each class. There are some opportunities for extended work,

but there is scope to further strengthen open-ended explorations and research or investigative work in order to motivate students and develop independence. Students like their teachers. They admire their expertise and are particularly appreciative of the individual help and time they feely give. However, there is insufficient intervention to help students develop the learning skills that A-level courses require, especially in the early stages. Students' notes could be better organised.

113. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good attention has been given to improving the levels of equipment and the use of ICT. Assessment procedures, including coursework assessment, measure progress accurately and regularly. Entry requirements are being raised from September 2005 to ensure that all students are well qualified for the course. Students value their visits to the University of Essex's laboratory days. The subject was not reported on at the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information Technology

Provision in information technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a high examination pass rate, though mostly at lower grades.
- Students make good progress, often from a below average starting point.
- Teachers know the subject well, and provide good guidance to students.
- Provision is led and managed well, and the subject is becoming increasingly popular.
- Students have good opportunities to apply their skills in practical contexts.
- Students are encouraged to consider ethical and moral issues related to IT.

Commentary

114. AS and A-level results are below average overall. The pass rate is high, but a low proportion of students achieve grades A and B. The subject is increasing in popularity, and more than twice as many students took A-level in 2004 than in 2003. Some have only taken a GCSE short course before moving to A-level, and the school opens up a wide range of opportunities for these students. For example, Year 13 students during the inspection were developing a range of database applications for business users. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was broadly average, though female students were achieving more than male students. Achievement from students' starting points is good.

115. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and provide very close guidance and support to students. They require students to think, to express their ideas concisely, and to apply them. Teachers generate in students a respect for the sheer scale of the progress that has been made with computer technology, and encourage them to consider ethical and moral issues. Most students respond well, although some in Year 12 are just beginning to adopt the self-critical and self-motivating attitudes that sixth form study requires.

116. The leadership and management are good. Work is well planned, shared among the teaching staff and there are plans in hand to widen the provision with an alternative computing course as a complement to the existing course, which is biased towards business solutions. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection, and the range of opportunities for students has been extended. This represents good improvement.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

117. Provision is satisfactory, and is steadily improving. Students make good use of the facilities in the Atlas Centre, and many use ICT effectively in their coursework. As in the main school, however, the contribution of ICT to learning in each subject has not yet been fully thought out and planned, and there are several subjects, notably modern languages, in which ICT could make a greater contribution to learning than it does. Senior management is taking every possible opportunity to develop the use of ICT, with increasing support from middle management.

HUMANITIES

History was inspected, and provision in religious education was sampled. Two lessons of A-level religious studies were sampled, and the quality of teaching and learning seen was good. Students showed a lively interest in the work, and compiled very thorough notes. All sixth form students study some religious education as part of the general studies course. However, as some are allowed to drop this course in Year 13, the statutory requirement for religious education to be studied by all students is not met.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know the subject well, and create a positive learning environment.
- The subject provides opportunities at A-level for a wide range of students, and numbers are rising.
- Lower-attaining students have weaknesses in literacy and in their factual knowledge.
- Leadership of the curriculum is knowledgeable and purposeful.
- There needs to be greater consistency in teaching quality, assessment and marking.
- Students make extensive use of research facilities, but their skills need further development.

Commentary

118. A-level results and the standard of work during the inspection are broadly average, but there are positive indications in many lessons that the department is working extremely hard to raise standards. Overall, achievement in history is satisfactory among all groups of students. The subject is attracting a growing number of lower-attaining male students, but overall standards among students joining the sixth form are broadly average.

119. Most students can use a variety of historical skills to produce structured arguments in their essays, but some lower ability students have an insufficient grasp of the essential factual knowledge to write answers in sufficient depth. Weaknesses in literacy are a barrier to the interpretation and analysis of some source evidence. However, all students benefit from good teacher support for learning and receive additional help when needed. Abler students can analyse historical sources critically and evaluate a wide range of evidence effectively. All students make full use of the school's excellent computer and library facilities for their homework and course research assignments.
120. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, with good features. Lessons are well planned and teachers have strong subject knowledge. Their enthusiasm for their subject has a positive impact on students' response. In the best lessons, students are able to undertake their own enquiries, engage in meaningful discussion and acquire the skills needed for further study after they leave school. However, some lessons provide too few opportunities for independent and collaborative work. There are some very good examples of careful assessment of students' work, including analysis of essays in depth. Students find the comments on these essays help them to improve the quality of their work, but this is not consistent across classes, and some comments are too brief to be useful.
121. Leadership is good and management satisfactory. History is now a popular subject choice because of the determined leadership qualities of the head of department. There is a strong team ethos and a determination to raise standards, but this is not yet backed by structures that ensure consistency in learning, and help lower-attaining students adapt effectively to the demands of A-level. Opportunities for enrichment activities are limited. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan lessons well, and demonstrate skills and techniques to a high standard.
- ICT is beginning to have a positive impact on standards, and some Year 12 students are achieving well.
- Assessment and target setting is not rigorous enough to promote high achievement.
- Relationships are good, and there are high levels of support for students; some rely too heavily on this.
- There are too few links with industry and specialist higher education institutions.

Commentary

122. Results in A-level and AS examinations have been below average to well below average over the past two years, with few passes at grades A and B. The standard of work seen in Year 13 was also below average, but there was some improvement in Year 12 work, partly due to effective use of ICT, and students were reaching broadly average standards. The current pattern of achievement is just satisfactory overall, but

the variation in students' work is too wide. There is some good achievement in Year 12, but there are weaknesses in some students' achievement in Year 13.

123. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching during the inspection was carried out on an individual basis. Teachers know the students well, and relationships are good. Teachers give good practical guidance and demonstrations, often timing these well to arrive at the point when students most need them. This approach makes good use of teachers' individual experience and skills but also leads to inconsistent teaching practice, and this hinders progress. Students analyse real-life-situations to innovate, create and take risks when designing, but not all display good understanding of materials and methods of construction, and some rely too heavily on the teachers for advice and guidance. Most students work independently and return after lessons to complete their work; this time is well spent. Teachers have a clear understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses but some students need to be closely monitored to work at a faster pace. Students know their predicted grades, but these are not always challenging enough, and procedures for monitoring and recording their work lack rigour.
124. Leadership and management, including development planning, are satisfactory. The learning environment has recently been redesigned, but there are few displays to promote learning. There are few links with industry and higher education institutions specialising in designing and manufacturing. Sixth form provision was not reported on in detail at the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design was inspected, and provision in drama was sampled. Provision in drama had suffered from staffing difficulties in the course of the year, but the quality of work seen during the inspection was exceptionally high, and students were making rapid progress towards their A-level examinations.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent knowledge of dramatic history and theory, combined with high levels of practical skill, enabled a teacher to develop high levels of understanding of physical drama.

This introduction to physical theatre began with exploration of basic techniques of facial and physical expression. These were demonstrated and practised to a very high standard, with intense concentration from students punctuated by humour. The teacher quickly related what they were doing to their previous work on psychological drama and to a range of texts they were studying. Students became highly aware of exactly what they were doing with their faces and bodies, and how this could contribute to a range of dramatic effects. As the work progressed, the teacher used her outstanding knowledge of dramatic theory to bring in an increasingly wide range of examples, all from the students' direct experience, and students offered thoughtful and practical suggestions that showed clear developments in their understanding. At each stage, further, lucid explanation from the teacher extended the scope of the work and built confidence. In the final part of the lesson, the teacher introduced a large prop, in the form of an old door, which students immediately and imaginatively used as the centrepiece for several improvised scenes. By the end of the lesson, all had made important gains in their practical and theoretical understanding of this aspect of theatre.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level and AS results were well below average in 2004.

- A newly appointed subject leader is taking action to improve provision and raise standards.
- Standards are improving through teaching that interests and engages students.
- Expectations of high standards of observational drawing are raising achievement.
- Productive relationships and positive attitudes are contributing to good learning.
- There is too little use of ICT.

Commentary

125. AS and A-level results in 2004 were well below average. All students taking A-level passed, but with low grades. The newly appointed head of department has evaluated these results carefully, and has taken effective steps to raise standards. The standard of work seen during the inspection was broadly average in Year 12 and Year 13, and achievement is now satisfactory and improving.
126. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' emphasis on accurate and precise observational drawing is improving students' awareness of how to be successful on the courses. Students are challenged to solve problems in imaginative ways, and particularly in the way that they incorporate the influences from the work of contemporary artists and designers. Teachers provide extensive information on the work of a wide range of artists. Students do further research and then select elements that they find interesting and are appropriate to their needs. There is extensive and searching dialogue between teachers and students. Students are lucid about their intentions and have a strong sense of personal involvement in their work that boosts achievement. Students learn new techniques and have opportunities to experiment in two and three dimensions. Assessment follows the strong pattern of the main school, and leads to good independent learning. Students benefit from having their own studio space that is available to them at all times. Written work makes a good contribution to literacy skills, particularly in extended writing.
127. Leadership and management are good. The new subject leader provides strong personal leadership to teachers and students, especially when addressing examination requirements. His comprehensive and vigorous approach is inspirational to all involved. Liaison between teachers who teach the sixth form is rigorous and well managed. This enables a range of teaching styles to benefit students' learning, though there is too little use of ICT. Planning for visits to galleries is proceeding smoothly. The increasing numbers that are being recruited onto courses are being well managed. The work being produced in the sixth form is helping to improve standards in art and design across the whole school. Sixth form provision was not reported in detail during the last inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Sports studies was sampled. A-level results were well above average in 2004, and the standard of work sampled during the inspection was equally high. Standards in non-examination groups seen were also above average, and sometimes well above average. Leadership and management are excellent, and there is an outstanding climate for learning in the department.

BUSINESS

Business education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students complete very detailed coursework, applying their skills to a wide range of business organisations.
- Computers are used most effectively in lessons to produce very good research and develop good ICT skills.
- Business links need developing further to allow students more first-hand experience.
- The subject is very well led and managed, with strong teamwork among the teachers.

Commentary

128. A-level results were broadly average in 2003 and 2004; all students passed in both years. AS results were well above average at grades A and B. The standard of A-level work seen during the inspection was above average in Year 12, and well above average in Year 13. Students taking AVCE in business were reaching broadly average standards, from a starting point that was well below average. Overall, achievement in business education is now very good.

129. Crucial to this significant rise in standards were the appointments, in 2004, of the new head of department and her colleagues, including a newly qualified teacher. Together, they make a dynamic teaching team. The relative strengths lie in higher-attaining students' substantial, detailed and analytical coursework, which draws on very good research and good language and numerical skills, and is enhanced by assured ICT skills. Relative weaknesses are the lower-attaining students' less well-developed analytical skills and less sophisticated use of language, though their knowledge and understanding of terminology are generally good.

130. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have expert knowledge of the subject, prepare lessons meticulously and have high expectations of their students. Teachers set a brisk pace and employ a wide range of strategies very effectively. These include tests, presentations, case studies and rigorous questioning and are all designed to challenge students and to make them think for themselves. ICT, which is fully incorporated into lessons, has also helped to develop students' very good independent learning skills. Consequently, students are well primed, work at a productive rate, applying the maximum intellectual effort, develop ideas and significantly increase their understanding of business. Teachers flesh out theory with apt references to existing companies, conveying their own love of the subject. As a result, students show interest in their work and sustain concentration. They read round topics taught and conduct thorough research, using local surveys, visits, interviews, textbooks and the Internet. Homework is demanding and marked to a high quality with detailed, constructive comments and good regard to literacy so that students have a clear understanding of their progress towards their target grades and how to improve their work and raise standards.

131. Leadership and management are very good and a model of best practice in terms of monitoring what is taught and standards attained, evaluating the outcomes and taking the necessary action. The newly qualified teacher receives first-rate support. Local

business links should be strengthened and the planned business challenges introduced to enrich students' learning, but overall, improvements, including better ICT resources, have been very good and standards have risen since the previous inspection.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

132. Personal, social and health education and general studies were sampled. All students take general studies in Year 12, and a substantial number continue this course to Year 13. Four out of the five lessons that took place during the inspection were observed. The quality of teaching and learning seen was satisfactory in Year 13, but unsatisfactory in Year 12, where attendance was poor and was not monitored effectively. Analysis of the students' work showed that it was often not kept up to date, and was not making the intended contribution to key skills. Leadership and management of the course are limited in scope, and do not include clear strategic direction from senior managers on its contribution to key skills. The quality of personal, social and health education sampled was good. The programme makes particularly good use of visiting speakers, and gives students good opportunities for work experience and charity work, as well as driving instruction.

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

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