

INSPECTION REPORT

THIRSK SCHOOL

Thirsk

LEA area: North Yorkshire

Unique reference number: 121666

Headteacher: Mr J C Lewis

Lead inspector: Mr B A Jones

Dates of inspection: 31st January – 4th February 2005

Inspection number: 268991

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

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Terms used in this report

Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are at Key Stage 3, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools after Year 6. Students in Years 10 and 11 are at Key Stage 4 of their education. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the sixth form, in Years 12 and 13. Students in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for students and students of all ages at school.

At the end of Year 9, students aged 14 take national tests in English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the students know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, students aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) or the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to these awards, including the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE), or to those of the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (A-level, A2). Students may take examinations leading to the Advanced Subsidiary award (AS), equivalent to half the difficulty of the full A-level, which is gained by further study beyond AS standard. Some students may also take Advanced Extension Awards (AEA).

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Community
Age range of students: 11 – 18
Gender of students: Mixed
Number on roll: 1172

School address: Topcliffe Road
Thirsk
North Yorkshire

Postcode: YO7 1RZ

Telephone number: 01845 522024
Fax number: 01845 526617

Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Mr G Cressey

Date of previous inspection: 24th May 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is a larger than average mixed comprehensive school with 1172 students on roll. There are 519 boys and 482 girls in the main school. The school has an average sized sixth form, comprising 85 male and 86 female students. The school has changed little in terms of size and composition since the previous inspection. Students come from a variety of backgrounds, including rural and urban, advantaged and disadvantaged communities. Students are also admitted from service families living at local army barracks. Overall, the intake is of average socio-economic status. On entry to Year 7, the intake is broadly average, but the presence of nearby selective schools means that a proportion of local higher attaining pupils go elsewhere. The vast majority of students are white and a small minority is of Asian background; altogether, less than one per cent of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds and none are at an early stage of learning English. Around four per cent take up their eligibility for free school meals, which is below average. The proportion of students with special educational needs is 16 per cent. This is broadly average. In the highest categories of need, students with social, emotional and behavioural problems are the single largest group followed by those with specific and moderate learning difficulties. Around two per cent have statements of special need, which is average. The school provides for a wide range of needs throughout the age range including the sixth form. Last year, some 26 students joined the school and five left, other than at the ages of 11 or 16.

The school has specialist Mathematics and Computing College status and hub school status for physical education. It takes part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award and has been awarded Artsmark and Sportsmark.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
18462	B. Jones	Lead inspector	
9132	J. Godfrey	Lay inspector	
33019	S. Aspinall	Team inspector	Geography
30749	H. Boyle	Team inspector	Art and design
15079	A. Boys	Team inspector	Science
22695	R. Cardinal	Team inspector	Business studies; Work-related learning (WRL); Provision for students with special educational needs
19586	W. Easterby	Team inspector	English, theatre studies/drama (sixth form)
11508	C. Griffin	Team inspector	English
20287	D. Harris	Team inspector	Modern languages; English as an additional language (EAL)
15465	T. Parish	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
15678	J. Radford	Team inspector	Religious education
22985	J. Sparkes	Team inspector	Biology; Chemistry (sixth form)
2079	T. Slack	Team inspector	Design and technology
31192	J. Stewart	Team inspector	Physical education
31191	D Sylph	Team inspector	History
1340	D. Wigley	Team inspector	Music; Citizenship
8341	W. Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics (sixth form)

The inspection contractor was:

Independent School Inspection Services (ISIS)
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school and it provides good value for money. Teaching is good and students achieve well academically and very well in their personal development. Nearly all aspects of the school's work is good and much of the work of the school is very good. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school is led very well and managed effectively. This ensures a clear direction to the school's development; governors make a very good contribution to the life and work of the school and both support and challenge the school's managers very effectively.
- Students achieve well overall, and very well in a number of subjects. Students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented achieve well in response to the teaching and additional provision they receive.
- Teaching is good throughout the school and across all subject departments. There is a significant proportion of very good teaching and some that is excellent.
- Students' attitudes are very good resulting in excellent attendance and very good behaviour in lessons. This ensures that good learning takes place in almost all lessons.
- The curriculum is effective in meeting the needs and aspirations of students. A vibrant and extensive range of enrichment activities enhances the curriculum.
- The school is very inclusive and provides very well for students' personal development. This helps to ensure that students are happy to come to school and enthusiastic about their life in school.
- Pastoral care and guidance are very good, ensuring a safe environment and one where very good relationships are fostered between students and with their teachers.
- The current staffing structure in information and communication technology (ICT) and the inadequate level of resources restrict the opportunities for students to benefit fully from the schools' recent accreditation as a specialist mathematics and computing college.
- The school's grading system in Years 7 to 9 does not allow students and parents to compare easily the progress made against national standards and targets for improvement are not yet sufficiently embedded in the school's practice.

The school has made good improvement since its previous inspection. Teaching is better overall and the school has ensured that above average standards are obtained over a wider range of its work. Weaknesses, including those in time allocations to particular subjects, have been successfully tackled. At present the weakness in providing ICT in all subjects across the curriculum has been partially tackled, but still is a barrier to good learning throughout the school. The accreditation as a specialist college for mathematics and computing requires the improvement of staffing and resources in the subject and plans to do so are well established. The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	B	C	B	
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*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Achievement is good. The GCSE examination results in 2004 were above average. This group of students performed better than students in schools deemed similar on the basis of their attainment at the end of Year 9. In the work seen in the inspection, standards are above average in Years 9 and 11. Students achieve well throughout Years 7 to 11. Students with special educational needs and the highest attaining students achieve well. The very few students whose mother tongue is not English achieve well, in line with their peers. There are no significant differences in the standards of boys and girls. Standards in the sixth form are above average, and students achieve well.

Students’ personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good. Students’ attitudes are very good, as is behaviour in the classroom. General behaviour in and around the school is good. Students’ attendance is well above average.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching is good throughout the main school. There is a high consistency to the amount of good and very good teaching and there is some teaching that is excellent. The impact of this is seen in learning that is consistently good or better. The very positive attitudes that students demonstrate towards their studies are significant in their good achievement. The curriculum is good and meets well the needs and aspirations of students, other than in ICT where overall provision is satisfactory. Pastoral care in the school is very good, characterised by very good relationships between teachers and students and among students. Students’ personal development and academic progress are supported very well. Students receive very good, well-informed advice and guidance so that they take courses that best meet their needs and aptitudes. There are very good links with other schools and colleges and the very good links with the local and wider community enhance students’ learning opportunities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. Leadership by the headteacher and key staff at senior and middle management levels is very good. The school is managed effectively. Governors do a very good job overall, but the school does not comply fully in providing an act of collective worship on a daily basis and there are some minor omissions in information to parents.

PARENTS’ AND STUDENTS’ VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents think this is a good school with many strong features. Their children settle very well and enjoy school and the range of activities offered. They feel that the good teaching and high expectations ensure their children make good progress. A few parents are concerned about bullying and would like more information about their children’s progress. Students like the school and feel trusted, safe and secure. They know that teaching is good, expectations are high and this helps them to do their best. They enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities. A significant number are concerned about behaviour and bullying, but inspectors found relationships to be very good and procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying are effective.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that more computing facilities are available and improve ICT staffing so that developments in the subject can take place within the structure of a clearly identified department.
- Establish more firmly the use of targets in Years 7 to 9.
- Modify the school's grading system in Years 7 to 9 to give clearer information about how students are progressing in relation to national standards.

Sixth form

- Increase ICT resources to improve study facilities and help students to develop their independent learning skills.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.
- Meet all the requirements in providing information to parents.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THIRSK SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form shows very good effectiveness. It takes in students with a wide range of attainment into Year 12, and through good teaching and a good curriculum enables them to achieve well. The sixth form is led very well, and supports students very well. Overall, the sixth form shows good cost effectiveness.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The sixth form is led very well and managed very effectively.
- Students achieve well in response to the good teaching they are receiving.
- The support and guidance given to students are very effective, based on procedures that review their progress in a systematic and rigorous manner.
- Students have excellent attitudes to learning, which help to foster the very good working atmosphere that exists in most lessons.
- Enrichment activities are very good and supplement a good curriculum that meets students' needs and aspirations well.
- ICT facilities currently are insufficient to allow good opportunities to use computers effectively to support teaching and learning.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	English literature very good. Standards are well above average and students' achievement is very good. Teaching is very good. In sampled work in French , students achieve very well in response to the very good teaching they receive, and in German , students in Year 12 are achieving very well in response to the good teaching they too receive. Standards are very high in Year 13 French and above average in Year 12 German.
Mathematics	Mathematics good. Students' standards are above average and they achieve well in response to the good teaching they receive.
Science	Biology good. Good teaching and learning, resulting in above average standards and good achievement. Chemistry good. Students achieve well and attain above average standards because of good teaching and their own good attitudes to their study. Sampled work in physics showed average standards, reflecting good achievement and good teaching.
Information and communication technology	ICT, (Year 12 GNVQ) , standards are average; teaching and achievement are good.
Humanities	Religious studies very good. Standards are above average, reflecting very good achievement in response to very good teaching. Sampled work in geography showed excellent teaching and learning with students' achievement excellent and standards that are well above average. Sampled work in history showed very good teaching and achievement and well above average standards.
Visual and performing arts and media	Drama very good. Very good teaching inspires students, who achieve very well. Standards in Year 13 are well above average, and above average in Year 12. Sampled work in art and design showed good and enthusiastic teaching leading to students achieving well and attaining above standards in Year 13. Sampled work in music was very good. Excellent attitudes of

students make the most of the very good teaching they receive. Standards are above average and achievement is very good.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel

Sampled work in **physical education and sports studies** showed very good provision. Teaching was not seen, but interviews with students and work scrutiny demonstrated that students receive very good teaching provision and achieve very well, attaining above average standards.

Business

Business studies good. Students achieve well in relation to their starting points in response to good teaching. Standards are average.

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 school reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Pastoral care is very good. Staff know students very well and offer very good guidance and advice based on effective and rigorous monitoring of academic progress and personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and management of the sixth form are both very good. There are very good systems in place to monitor the work of the sixth form and assess the effectiveness of teaching. The management of systems to monitor students' progress are very good. Effective planning has ensured a good curriculum is in place to meet the needs and aspirations of all students, including some of well below average attainment.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students regard this as a very good sixth form and enjoy being students here. They like the friendly atmosphere and good relationships with staff and students. They feel they are treated fairly and with respect and find teachers to be knowledgeable, accessible and helpful. They appreciate the well-informed advice and guidance they receive on careers. They have no major concerns but would like better access to more reliable computers to help them with their work.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement in the main school is good in Years 7 to 11. Standards are above average in Year 9 and in Year 11. In the sixth form, standards are above average and achievement is good among students, who have a wide range of attainment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good throughout Years 7 to 11 because the good teaching across the school means that students learn well. As a result, above average standards are being maintained.
- In the main school, students achieve at least well in most subjects, and very well in English, science, German, history, music, physical education, religious education and drama.
- Students' excellent attendance, very good behaviour and positive attitudes are significant factors in their good achievement.
- Students with special educational needs and gifted and talented students achieve well because they are supported very effectively and benefit from additional teaching provision.
- Sixth form standards are above average and students achieve well in relation to their starting points. They achieve very well in English, drama and religious education.

Commentary

Main school

1. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were above average. Compared to students in schools deemed similar on the basis of their starting points in Year 7, this group were well above average. Results in English were average and were below those in mathematics and science, due to significant staffing difficulties throughout the year. In mathematics, results were well above average and were above average in science. The trend of improvement in results to 2003 was above the trend nationally (there is no data available yet to show the trend to 2004). Overall, this group of students achieved well, and very well compared to students in similar schools.
2. Overall results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were above average compared to all schools and compared to schools deemed similar in terms of students' attainment at the end of Year 9. In relation to their starting points in Year 7, these students achieved well. One hundred per cent of students gained at least one grade A*-G. The trend in results to 2004 was below the trend nationally, primarily due to lower results in 2003. However, students in that year were a lower attaining group and the school added good value to this group over their five years from Year 7 to 11. Statutory targets were exceeded in 2004.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34 (37.4)	33.3(33.4)

Mathematics	38 (37.7)	(35.4)
Science	34 (36.8)	(33.6)

There were 211 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

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	61 (54)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	97 (92)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	1. 100 (96)	2. 96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	37.6 [301.0] (36.2)	34.9 [282.8] (34.7)

There were 202 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Figures in square brackets refer to new grading system in 2004.

3. Students join the school with levels of attainment that are average in English, mathematics and science. In other subjects, standards are mainly average, other than in design and technology, geography and music where they are below average. In Year 9, standards are above average overall, reflecting good achievement. Standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Students achieve well in mathematics and science and very well in English. In Year 9, current standards of work are well above average in music and religious education, and here students achieve very well. Standards are above average in all other subjects, except design and technology and geography, where standards are average. When account is taken of their starting points, students in all these subjects achieve well. Above average standards are being maintained and in some cases improved, as in music and religious education. Central to this is the improvement in teaching resulting from the school's use of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy and the consequent consistency in approach to planning and structuring lessons. The very positive qualities that students bring to their lessons are also important factors.
4. In the work seen in Year 11, standards are above average. Students' achievement is at least good in all subjects. In English, science, modern foreign languages, history, music, physical education and religious education, students achieve very well. The level of students' achievement is clearly linked to the quality of teaching they receive throughout Years 7 to 11. Standards are well above average in English, science, German, history, music, physical education and religious education. Standards are above average in other subjects. Overall, current standards seen are in line with recent examination results, which were also above average. Drama was sampled. Here, GCSE results in 2004 were well above average. In lessons observed, students achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and by Year 11 standards are very high, reflecting very good achievement.
5. Students enter the school with average standards in literacy. They progress to above average by Year 9 and well above average by Year 11. Skills of speaking and listening are good and students express themselves clearly, seen across a wide range of subjects, using the technical language of the specific subject well. Students read with

confidence, expressing themselves clearly, and they are keen to read aloud in class. Students' written work demonstrates a good level of clarity as they demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in subjects across the curriculum. Overall, their well-developed skills ensure that students are able to respond to the learning demands that are made of them across the curriculum as a whole. Students' competency in mathematics is above average and numeracy skills are developed well in mathematics lessons. Students' competence in the use of ICT is average and could be better. At present, computers are used in subjects across the curriculum, but access to them is restricted as there are not enough of them.

6. In this very inclusive school, different groups of students achieve well, in line with their peers. The higher attaining students and those who are gifted and talented achieve well. They receive additional provision outside the classroom that challenges and stretches them. In addition, teachers plan their lessons effectively to challenge them. There are no students at an early stage of English language acquisition, and those students who come from minority ethnic groupings achieve well, in line with their peers. Differences in the attainment of boys and girls are not significantly out of line with differences nationally. Both groups of students achieve well throughout the school. The achievement of students with special needs is good and there are many examples of very good and excellent achievement, including gains in self-esteem and social skills as well as in learning. In 2004, the achievement of Year 11 students was very good. The 40 students entering the school in 1999 and placed on the special needs register gained an average of nearly nine GCSE passes. Almost one third of these passes was at grade C or above. The great majority of Year 10 students with special needs made good gains in National Curriculum test scores between Year 7 and Year 9 with a third demonstrating very good achievement with significant improvement covering all three core subjects (English, mathematics and science). A small number of Year 9 students with poor attendance records have made very good gains in their attendance over the past year because of the extra support given. Similarly, younger students make very good gains in self-esteem because of the effectiveness of additional support. Students completing additional reading programmes starting in Year 7 make very good gains in reading test scores.

Sixth form

7. The range of attainment of students entering the sixth form is wider than normally found. Some students with well below average scores at GCSE undertake a tailor-made vocational course in ICT because there are no suitable alternative courses locally. This enables them to stay in education and benefit from the wider opportunities of being a sixth form student in this school. Otherwise, attainment on entry to examination courses for GCE A-level and vocational courses is broadly average. Recent results in these courses have been above average and the work seen during the inspection is above average, reflecting continued good achievement.
8. In 2004, results overall met expectations that were set on the basis of students' prior attainment and including in the targets an appropriate element of aspiration and challenge. In the 2004 GCE A-level and VCE examinations the average points scores of all students was above average. In relation to these students' standards at entry to Year 12, this represented good achievement. Within this broad category, there were some variations and male students overall gained significantly higher scores than females in the higher grades A and B. In vocational examinations, students taking the business course attained above average grades and achieved well. Those taking the

health and social care course achieved satisfactorily, gaining an average proportion of A to E grades, but no grades in the A and B range.

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	94.0 (96.0)	92.4 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	34.1 (33.2)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	283.8 (262.8)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 80 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

9. In the work seen in the inspection, eight subjects were sampled to include GCE A-level work and vocational courses. Observed standards were in line with the recent results, and were overall above average.
10. In the work seen in Year 13, standards are well above average in English and drama and above average in religious studies. This represents very good achievement in relation to students' starting points in these subjects. In mathematics, biology and chemistry, standards are above average, and students are achieving well. In both courses in business studies, the GCE and the vocational courses, standards are broadly average, but students are achieving well in relation to their starting points in Year 12. In the Year 12 ICT vocational course, students started with below average, and in some cases well below average, attainment. Standards are broadly in line with expectations and they are, as a group, achieving well. Students with special educational needs achieve very well.
11. In the subjects that the inspection focused upon, the standards of the students' key skills were above average overall. They were particularly strong in communication where there are enhanced by an effectively planned programme during tutorial time. Most subjects give good opportunities for the development of communication skills although not enough opportunities were observed in mathematics. In business courses, students' standards in the application of number were well above average as evidenced by their analysis of financial data. ICT is a relative weakness. Standards are average. Although students who do not have a GCSE in ICT gain accreditation via the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), there are not enough opportunities to apply and develop ICT skills in subjects. This reflects a lack of resources, not just in terms of computers, but in having to hand other equipment such as data projectors for business courses. Students, in questionnaire returns, said they had difficulty finding computers to use for coursework but others spoken to stated that access was reasonable. Students use computers well in physics, for spreadsheet analysis of data, for graphing, and for presenting their own work to the class using a data projector. Art students use image manipulating software well; geography students effectively research and gather resources from the Internet.

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

Students' attitudes to work are very good and behaviour is good in general and very good in lessons. Attendance is well above national averages. Unauthorised absence is below the national median. Punctuality is good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The very good working ethos is a strength of the school and promotes learning and achievement of all students.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' very good attitudes to learning enable them to achieve well.
- Relationships across the school are very good and supportive.
- Behaviour in lessons is very good and ensures a good working atmosphere where achievement is valued.
- Students like coming to school. Attendance is excellent and punctuality is good.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good and adds significantly to the development of positive qualities in students throughout the age range.

Commentary

Main school

12. Students learn well as a result of their very good attitudes. They enjoy their lessons and are keen to achieve their best. Students' very good behaviour in lessons and their very positive attitudes mean that they are attentive and well motivated and respond well to teachers' questions. Students concentrate well in class and persevere with tasks. Students work very well on their own and with others in pairs and groups because very good relationships are encouraged. They are friendly, polite and helpful to staff and visitors. They enjoy community responsibilities such as raising money for good causes and participating in sports and drama productions. They feel trusted by the school to act responsibly.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – any other White background
Mixed – any other mixed background
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1118	98	1
11		
2		
1		
2		
38		

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

13. High standards of behaviour have been maintained since the previous inspection. Behaviour is good around the school in general and is very good in lessons. On the inspection questionnaire, a significant number of students expressed concerns about behaviour and bullying. However, during the inspection students responded well to teachers' very high expectations of good behaviour. Friendly banter in the playground at times is a bit rough, but does not normally cross the boundary to become bullying. Some students stated that staff do not treat them fairly and with respect, but this was not evident during inspection. Behaviour around the school and at break times is

good. Some students are careless with their litter in the playground but there is very little vandalism or graffiti.

14. The level of exclusions is static and relatively low in number for a school of this size. They are most often for persistent disobedience, disruptive behaviour or fighting. The school's policy of using short exclusions is effective in improving behaviour and few students are excluded more than once. The majority of exclusions involves white boys of British origin as is the national pattern although a higher than usual proportion of girls is excluded. A higher number of boys are excluded more than once.
15. The school works hard to promote good relationships and to prevent bullying and this results in very good relationships across the school. Students work well together in mixed groups and appreciate the efforts of others. Students in Year 7 like the support they receive from older 'Listeners', a group of older students who are trained to help their younger peers. There is a high awareness of bullying and although many students are concerned about harassment, the school has very good strategies for dealing with incidents and students and parents are pleased with the effectiveness of action taken.
16. The school provides very well for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and students themselves enjoy the wide range of activities provided. Students' spiritual development has improved since the time of the previous inspection and is now good. The recent audit of provision shows that in almost all subjects of the curriculum students are encouraged to develop self-awareness through taking part in well-planned activities which have a spiritual dimension to them, such as creative writing and role-play, the study of different religious beliefs, and spirituality as expressed in art and music. However, there are not enough opportunities to reflect on spiritual matters in assemblies and tutor sessions.
17. The school provides very good opportunities for students' moral development. There is a clear code of conduct that students understand and respect, and in the daily routines of school life students show courtesy to visitors and thoughtfulness for the well-being of others. Assemblies are often based on moral themes, such as the importance of mutual trust, and all subjects offer students of all ages a wide range of opportunities to explore moral issues. Social development is very good. Most students are very well aware of the responsibilities of living in a community, and they work together in a very positive way, particularly in music, drama and sporting activities. Students are encouraged to take on responsibilities, which they do very willingly. The school councils ensure that students' views are taken into consideration, and the 'Listeners' initiative enables older students to lend a sympathetic ear to those in need of help. A considerable number of charities are very well supported, and students represent the school in a responsible way, not only in the many extra-curricular activities that bring them into contact with the local community, but also in those visits that take them further afield. Students' cultural development is very good. In most subjects and in the programme of enrichment opportunities that the school provides for them, students gain a very good understanding and appreciation of the richness and diversity of their own and others' cultures. Students are very keen to join in the different activities and participation in sport and the arts is excellent.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.7	School data	0.2
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

18. Attendance is excellent as a result of the school's care and support and the efforts of parents and carers to ensure their children's good attendance. There are excellent systems to monitor attendance to school and individual lessons. This enables the school to tackle any problem areas and individuals effectively. Holiday requests are not always authorised. The educational social worker knows students and their parents well and makes a very good contribution to improving the attendance of the few students with problems. Parents appreciate the need for good attendance. There is very little unauthorised absence. Registration procedures are very good and the majority of form time is used well to enhance students' learning and personal development. The extra support given to a few boys in Year 9 has raised their attendance significantly and this has a good impact on their achievement. Work-related courses more suited to the needs of individuals have improved attendance. Punctuality is good, although many students are dependent on buses to get to school, which are not always punctual.

Sixth form

19. Students in the sixth form have excellent attitudes to learning. They enjoy being in the sixth form and are keen to do their best and be involved in all the school has to offer. Relationships between students are excellent and they support each other very well. Behaviour is exemplary. Students understand the importance of being in school and in lessons and attendance is excellent. Students are very eager to take on responsibilities; for example, some help out in sports and drama lessons in the main school. The student sixth form board is consulted on school issues and organises charitable events such as the party for senior citizens. There is good involvement in activities outside lessons such as sports and full-scale productions such as *Anything Goes*.
20. The school makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of sixth form students and they very readily take on a wide variety of responsibilities and take leadership roles within the school. Students gain valuable experience in community work by organising fund-raising for local and national charities and by taking much of the responsibility for the annual senior citizens' party. The general studies course enables students to develop their spiritual and moral awareness through talks on religious issues given by outside speakers and in discussions on ethics and values. Students' cultural and social development is furthered through the wealth of extra-curricular activities provided by subject departments, and students say they enjoy taking part in concerts and drama productions. In recent years, many students have benefited from the opportunities to help other people offered through a Millennium Volunteers group.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good all-round education. The quality of teaching and the use of assessment are good. The curriculum is good. Pastoral care is very good. The school has

very good links with parents. There are very good links with other schools, colleges and the community.

Teaching and learning

Teaching is good throughout the school and results in good learning and achievement. Students' very positive attitudes and their very good behaviour in lessons are significant in their level of achievement. The assessment of students and its use are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The consistency of good and better teaching across all years and all subjects is a significant factor in students' good achievement.
- Teachers have developed the use the National Key Stage 3 Strategy effectively to ensure good planning and structure to their lessons
- Very good systems are in place to identify under-achievement and then tackle it with very effective, and where deemed necessary additional, teaching provision.
- Teachers' subject specialist knowledge and their commitment to improving teaching and learning have a positive impact on students' achievement.
- Students learn well because they have very good attitudes to their studies, seen in their very good behaviour in class and excellent attendance.
- The staffing arrangements for teaching in ICT, coupled with lower than average resources, act as barriers to learning.
- Data about students' attainment is used well to set targets for national tests and examinations but is not yet sufficiently refined in some subjects in Years 7 to 9 to monitor students' progress towards those targets.
- The grading system does not allow students and parents to easily compare how well students are doing in relation to national standards in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 185 lessons.

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
11 (6%)	69 (37%)	88 (48%)	17 (9%)	0	0	0

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

Main school

21. The school has taken the Key Stage 3 strategy and developed it into an approach to good practice that has been spread to good effect throughout the school. Teaching and learning have subsequently benefited from a clear structure to planning and organising lessons, leading to a common framework that students and staff appreciate. As a result of this initiative and through engaging in the parallel processes of monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning regularly and rigorously, teaching has improved. The dissemination of very good practice has had a clear impact on the overall quality of teaching and students are achieving well. There is now a significant proportion of very good teaching across departments and some excellent teaching. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed in the inspection and only a minority of teaching that was satisfactory rather than good.
22. The school uses data about students' learning very effectively to identify and tackle under-achievement. Effective systems and strategies have been put into place to ensure that students of all levels of attainment are stretched and challenged by the teaching they receive. Subject specialists undertaking the large majority of teaching further help this. Students with special educational needs and those who are identified as gifted and talented receive additional provision to ensure that their particular needs are met. As a result, they too achieve well, in common with their peers.
23. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are at least good in all subjects and very good in English, citizenship, music and religious education. Students are very positive in their approach to learning and this, coupled with their very good behaviour in class, ensures that good learning takes place in most lessons. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are good. Teachers and students focus well on the need to gain success in examinations and the additional motivation leads to very good teaching across a wider range of subjects. These include English, science, German, history, music, physical education and religious education.
24. Teachers maintain high expectations regarding students' level of effort and they challenge effectively, capitalising on students' positive attitudes in order to demand much. For example, homework is used well in most subjects and students benefit in their learning from work that extends that covered in the classroom and which encourages them to research and become more independent. Teachers are good at using the technical language of their subject and encouraging students to do the same. This reinforces basic literacy skills effectively. Characteristically, lessons incorporate a starter activity and the range used ensures that students' attention is engaged and their thoughts focused upon the lesson ahead. Typically, students work hard in an atmosphere where independent learning is encouraged through the use of pair and group work. Very good relationships are fostered between students and teachers have positive relations with their students. The result is usually seen in lessons where classes are managed effectively, learning is good and attainment is valued.

Example of outstanding practice

A Year 8 lesson in German demonstrated how well students achieve when responding to the teacher's high expectations about using the foreign language as the only means of communication throughout the lesson.

From start to finish there is an understanding between teacher and his students that he and they will only speak German. No English is needed because teacher's colourful use of mime and gesture ensures that no

one is in doubt. German is used spontaneously by students who want to ask or say something: *Ich bin fertig*, says a boy who has finished. *Darf ich zur Musikstunde?* asks another who has a music lesson. There is a direct relationship between enjoyment and learning here. By the end students have learned how to ask and tell each other what they do during a typical day and have rehearsed the language they need in so many different ways that they are buoyantly confident. Teacher is fulsomely enthusiastic and encouraging: *du bist intelligent! Das ist wunderbar!* Pretending to be Jerry Springer with a microphone as he interviews them about their school day. Students love it – boys and girls alike – and average attainers are turned into high achievers by the experience.

25. Teaching arrangements to meet the learning needs of all students are good. The school is fully committed to including all groups of students. There is no formal policy of organising classes so that boys or girls are not allowed to dominate in any one particular group (for example by varying the seating arrangements in lessons) but such arrangements are made in some subjects. Teachers treat all students equally and encourage all to participate fully in lessons, with the result that all groups achieve equally well. The highest attaining students have their particular needs met by teaching that is planned well to ensure extension tasks and additional activities to make sure that they are stretched and challenged appropriately. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good overall including a very effective contribution from support staff.
26. The school has taken a very positive and successful approach to the teaching of literacy skills. Development of literacy is considered as central to the whole-school approach to teaching and learning and is seen in the consistent use of group discussion, spelling and vocabulary, and extending reading skills. This approach has proved to be effective in raising literacy skill levels. Teachers' skills and confidence in their use of ICT in lessons have improved since the previous inspection as a result of extensive training. The separate ICT course is taught by some 15 teachers, five of whom are heads of other subject departments. The expertise is thus spread across subjects and has resulted in good improvement in this aspect of provision since the previous inspection. However, the lower than average number of computers and their location around the school is currently a barrier to further improvement. The school has an appropriate written policy for developing students' numeracy skills across the curriculum and most subjects are making a satisfactory contribution to teaching those skills.
27. Assessment is good. The thoroughness and constructive use of assessment are at least good in most subjects and very good in many. The available data is used well to enable the school to make comparisons against national benchmarks and for monitoring individual students' achievement. Information about students' attainment is used well to set targets for students for national tests and examinations but the process is not yet sufficiently refined in some subjects in Years 7 to 9 to monitor students' progress towards those targets. In addition, the schools' grading system does not allow students and parents to easily compare how well students are doing in relation to national standards.
28. Senior and middle managers, and most subject teachers, make good use of the available assessment information to respond effectively to the needs of students. Procedures for assessing students with special educational needs are good. In most subjects, assessment is used well for lesson planning. Marking usually provides good feedback to students about their standards and what they need to do to improve them further. Very good practice exists in modern foreign languages, history, geography, religious education and science.

Sixth form

29. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In the eight subjects inspected in detail, teaching and learning are very good in English literature, drama, and religious studies; in the other subjects teaching and learning are good. In the GCE A-level courses, this quality of teaching has resulted in improved achievement in English literature and biology and continued good achievement in mathematics and chemistry. In religious studies, the very good teaching students receive means that they are achieving better than examination groups in recent years. Students studying drama achieve very well, as their predecessors have done in recent years. In the vocational areas in business studies, teaching is good and students continue to achieve well, in line with recent years. In ICT vocational courses, teaching is good and the lower attaining students who are taking this course achieve well.
30. The good qualities in the teaching of students in Years 7 to 11 are also found in the sixth form because many staff are involved in teaching in both areas. For example, support for students with special educational needs appropriately strikes a very good balance between giving support and maximising opportunities for independent learning. Teachers' very good subject knowledge, allied to good planning based on their understanding of the examination demands of their areas, leads to effective teaching. Students state that they appreciate teachers' accessibility and support as well as their subject expertise. The rigorous and regular review process that involves staff and students in examining progress underpins, and is an integral part of, the good quality teaching that students receive. Lessons typically demonstrate a shared commitment to hard work in a very good working atmosphere where learning is valued.
31. In teaching key skills, most subjects give good opportunities for the development of communication skills, although not enough opportunities were observed in mathematics. Students' competency in mathematics is above average. Consequently, they are able to tackle the demands of their different subjects and courses successfully. For example, in biology and chemistry, students apply their mathematical skills well. In business courses students' standards in the application of number were well above average as evidenced by their analysis of financial data. ICT is a relative weakness. One area of teaching that is not of the same standard is the use of ICT. Students and staff do not yet have the ease of access to ICT to support the promotion of this aspect of independent learning. The recent acquisition of specialist college status makes this a temporary problem, but nevertheless one that students are currently facing. The very positive attitudes of students towards their studies are a feature of the sixth form students and are a factor in their overcoming the ICT barrier to their learning. Although students who do not have a GCSE in ICT gain accreditation via the European Computer Driving Licence, there are not enough opportunities to apply and develop ICT skills in subjects. This reflects a lack of resources, not just in terms of computers but of having to hand other equipment such as data projectors for business courses.
32. Assessment is very good. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment are very good, continuing smoothly from the main school into the sixth form. The available data is used well to enable comparisons to be made against national benchmarks and for monitoring the achievement of individual students. Students' standards and progress are closely monitored by the senior management, the head of sixth form, subject teachers and tutors. Very good systems are in place to chart students'

academic progress and effort. Value added approaches and target setting are well established.

33. Senior and middle managers and most subject teachers make good use of the available assessment information, to respond effectively to the individual needs of students. In most subjects assessment is used well for lesson planning. Marking is thorough and linked well to examination criteria.

The curriculum

The breadth of curricular opportunities is good in the main school and in the sixth form. Enrichment is very good. The provision of staffing and accommodation is satisfactory. Learning resources are unsatisfactory because of inadequacies in ICT provision.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good range of curricular opportunities in the main school and in the sixth form, enhanced by developing vocational courses.
- Enrichment opportunities are very good and excellent in the arts.
- Despite strengths in staffing and in aspects of the library, resources are unsatisfactory overall because of deficiencies in a range of equipment for ICT.

Commentary

Main school

34. Curriculum provision is good and has improved since the previous inspection. There is a longer school day; the amount of taught time is now in line with national recommendations. The time allocated for the teaching of English and mathematics has increased and the provision for ICT has expanded. However, the school recognises the need for increased opportunities for the application and reinforcement of the students' ICT skills, in line with its stated aims as a specialist mathematics and computing college.
35. Curricular provision is good during Years 7 to 9. The arrangements ensure coverage of the National Curriculum. There are opportunities for students to take French or German. Higher attainers may take both languages during Years 8 and 9. There are separately taught drama lessons for all students. Students commence their GCSE social and religious studies course in Year 9.
36. Curricular provision is also good in Years 10 and 11. All take GCSE English, mathematics and double award science, though fewer students take English literature than in most schools. All complete the full GCSE course in social and religious studies started in Year 9. In Year 10 the first cohort of students is taking a double award GCSE vocational course in health and social care. The school acknowledges the need for expansion of vocational courses and currently provides satisfactory provision for work-related learning. There is a good range of GCSE subjects that includes drama, electronics, business studies, physical education and a range of design and technology courses. The school also runs a well-targeted 'Bridge' programme, which offers college and work experience opportunities to students not suited for a full range of GCSEs. A combined studies course offers a smaller group of students the

opportunity to undertake a range of vocational experiences. They receive accreditation via the Youth Award Scheme.

37. The opportunities for enrichment are very good. They are excellent in the arts. There is a wide range of musical ensembles: instrumental; jazz; string. As well as performing in the school's annual musical production the school band has played in festivals and concerts in other parts of the country and abroad. Drama thrives in the school. There is a busy schedule of productions and clubs both in and out of school. In sport, students have many opportunities to take part at both competitive and recreational levels. The school's competitive teams are highly successful. Support for learning is very good. Year 9 students attend a raising attainment club to improve their basic skills in numeracy and ICT. There are off-site learning opportunities for gifted mathematicians. Many subjects run clubs and there is a well-established student foreign exchange programme. In religious studies students visit faith centres of different religions. The library is full each lunch time with students, including a large number of boys, engaged in reading books, magazines and computer-based texts. The school monitors student involvement in events and the take-up rates are high.
38. Careers education is very good. It is taught in social and religious studies and tutorials. Careers education is taught in Year 7 and 8 by form tutors who teach students about decision-making. From Year 9, careers lessons are taught by a specialist team and supported by Connexions. Year 10 students value two weeks of work experience. A very good range of placements is found and these are well organised, monitored and evaluated. The school's very good business and community links ensure that a wide range of suitable work experience opportunities is available. All individuals in Year 11 have personal interviews to help them decide their future and extra support is given to those who need it.
39. Curricular programmes ensure equality of opportunity and all students have full access to the National Curriculum, with the exception of three students for whom it is disapplied. Effective steps have been taken to match the curriculum to students' needs, for example through the Bridge programme in Years 10 and 11. The school has also taken action to tackle under-achievement by offering extra programmes for identified students in Years 10 and 11 and this has helped to raise their attainment. Because of the school's predominantly white British intake, special efforts have been made to enhance the students' understanding of life in a multi-cultural society by dealing with these issues in lessons and by offering extra-curricular visits with a multi-cultural theme. This has had a very positive effect on the students' attitudes and incidents of a racist nature are rare.
40. Provision for special needs is very good and has significant strengths in supporting a very wide range of needs throughout the school's age range. There are very clear criteria for students receiving support. Students with statements are appropriately prioritised including full-time support for some individuals. Literacy needs receive a very high priority with an additional multi-sensory programme provided for all students with the lowest reading scores on entry. This provision is open-ended and students remain on the programme until they complete it successfully. This very effective programme is delivered by support staff who themselves are a key element in the very good provision overall. The great majority of support is in mainstream classrooms. The quality and effectiveness of support are enhanced by small groups created through subject setting and by the deployment of individual support staff to designated

curriculum areas. Lunchtime activities led by support staff including homework and 'talk together' clubs further enhance provision.

41. Very good curricular planning has resulted in enhanced provision to support some individuals with additional needs including those displaying behaviour problems and those who had previously lacked motivation and direction. One member of staff provides the great majority of the curriculum for a very small group of Year 9 students who have presented significant challenges. The provision made is very effective and has resulted, for example, in some excellent improvement in individual attendance. The school has made very good use of additional funding to provide a combined studies programme for some students in Years 10 and 11. The innovative programme offers a very wide range of experiences for students, including additional work and college experience. Inspection evidence shows these students to be highly motivated by the additional opportunities provided.
42. Accommodation is satisfactory overall because the school has been efficient in adapting the buildings and outdoor facilities to cater for a growing number of students. Some areas of accommodation are unsuitable or outdated, for example some science laboratories, and some require a better cleaning regime, for example some ICT teaching areas. Boys' changing facilities for physical education are poor. The students complained about the toilets which are not all well serviced and some do not have lockable doors. Most departments benefit from a suite of rooms in close proximity to each other, and very good use of display in rooms and corridors gives both a sense of ownership and interest to many areas. A new art and design area, drama studio, refurbished textile classroom and extended library have enhanced opportunities for the curriculum, as has the outdoor, floodlit astro-turf football/hockey pitches. The library is good. Although a little under-resourced in terms of non-fiction and computers, it has a very good range of fiction. There is good liaison between the librarian and subject leaders. A good range of activities effectively promotes reading to a large number. The lending rate is high. Accessibility requirements have been considered and some areas adapted but access by wheelchair to most first floor areas is not possible. The site is relatively open and the school has installed CCTV cameras, fencing and gates to improve security, but unwanted access by the public in the evenings and weekends remains a problem
43. The match of the teachers to the demands of the curriculum is good and the school is well staffed by teachers who have a wide range of relevant experience and subject expertise. The school does not have any significant difficulty in recruiting good quality applicants to vacant posts but the number of such applicants is decreasing in many subjects. Teaching and learning are supported well by the effective deployment of special needs support staff and technicians. The site management and administrative staff make an important contribution to the smooth day-to-day running of the school.
44. Resources to support learning are good in most respects, other than in the important area of ICT. The school has recently been accredited as a specialist college for mathematics and computing. This requires that staffing and hardware resources are improved significantly from the current situation. At present, the organisation of staff is unsatisfactory, as there is no clearly identified subject department. The hardware provision, including computers and interactive whiteboards, is inadequate. As a result, this constitutes a significant barrier to staff developing this aspect of their teaching and to students developing their independent learning skills. Library facilities are good; for example, the provision for fiction is very good and the facility is appropriately staffed

with qualified personnel. Specialist equipment in departments across the school is generally good.

Sixth form

45. In the sixth form the curriculum provision is good. The range of subjects at AS and A2 attracts a high number of students and completion rates are high. There are advanced vocational courses in business and health and social care and an intermediate course in ICT. All Year 12 students take general studies and a high proportion takes a core ICT skills course. As in Years 10 and 11 the school is aware of the need for further development of vocational provision to meet the aptitudes of a wider range of students. The school is also seeking to expand its key skills provision. Provision for individual sixth formers with special educational needs is very good both in terms of the expertise provided by support staff and by ensuring full access to a combination of courses that appropriately challenge and meet their needs and aspirations.
46. The positive approach to enrichment observed in the main school continues into the sixth form. Very good opportunities for participation in recreational and competitive sport continue. All students, not only drama students, have the chance to take part in a sixth form production. Students support teachers in lessons with younger students. Other activities include: groups for millennium volunteers; critical thinking; a people's war oral history project; and team building. The general studies course provides an extensive look at a range of issues such as prisons, faith in the United Kingdom, health and politics. Good provision is made for personal, social and health education (PSHE), with an interesting range of topics often delivered by outside speakers to give a greater impact. Tutorial programmes enhance communication skills. The statutory requirement for the provision of religious education in the sixth form is fully met.
47. Courses in the sixth form are staffed by specialist teachers who provide a very good match to the requirements of the curriculum on offer. Accommodation is shared with the main school and has the same strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, resources are mainly good, other than in the current level of ICT equipment that restricts both teaching and learning.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes very good care of students' welfare, health and safety. Pastoral support continues to be a strength of the school. The advice and guidance based on effective monitoring are very good and have a positive impact on achievement. The school canvasses students' views very well and involves them in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Health and safety and procedures are very good.
- Induction arrangements for new students are very good.
- Pastoral care is very good and students have very trusting relationships with adults in school. This gives them the confidence to achieve well.
- Students' academic progress is well tracked in relation to their personal development so that very good advice and support are provided as they go through the school.
- Students' views are regularly canvassed and taken into good account in the development of the school.

Commentary

Main school

48. Procedures for dealing with students' welfare, health and safety and for child protection issues are very good. Risk assessments are completed routinely within subject areas, in the whole school and for visits outside school. Internet service provision is safe and secure. The ventilation in one computer room is poor. The canteen offers a choice of healthy foods but the main diet of students is chips and cake. Snack machines have been removed, to encourage healthier eating.
49. Pastoral care is very good and is a strength of the school, enabling students to achieve well in a secure and supportive environment. Induction arrangements are very good and aided by the very good links with local primary schools. Students settle very well in school. Form tutors and pastoral staff know students very well and monitor students' academic progress and personal development through planners and students' profiles. Students enjoy good relationships with their form tutors and the majority of form time is used well to enhance their personal or academic development. Students know their attainment levels in most subjects and are involved in setting their own targets for improvement. However, target setting is not yet fully embedded in the school's practice in Years 7 to 9. Learning mentors and the 'Raising Attainment' group have a significant impact on attainment. Behaviour is very well tracked and parents are kept well informed. Congratulatory letters are often sent to parents and students. Incidents of bullying and racism are monitored and dealt with effectively. Education about bullying has a high profile in school and relationships with staff are so supportive that students are happy to report any incident. The school has very good links with a wide range of outside support agencies that help to support individual and more vulnerable students very well. The educational social worker, based in school, provides very good support to improve attendance and counsel vulnerable students.
50. Review procedures for students with special educational needs are excellent. Whole-school systems and procedures provide a very effective means of keeping all students with special needs under review. There are weekly meetings of key staff that in turn link with half-termly meetings, each focusing on a particular year group. These in turn link with a regular half-termly meeting of school staff with outside agencies including, for example, those providing psychological, medical and behavioural support. The school has refined its review procedures to ensure that there is clear and consistent oversight of students with both learning and pastoral needs, including students being monitored although not assigned to stages of the special needs register. These procedures enhance the thoroughness of individual education plan reviews. Statutory requirements for annual reviews of statements of special needs are met fully.
51. Throughout the school, support is effectively focused on identifying and tackling under-achievement so that all students can achieve well. Test and examination results are analysed to review the progress of different groups of students, such as students from different ethnic backgrounds, boys and girls, students with special educational needs and the gifted and talented. This ensures that action can be taken to tackle differences in achievement that may arise. A small number of Year 9 students whose behaviour and attitudes are inhibiting their progress and achievement are taught in a separate unit within the school to allow them more individual support for their needs.
52. There is a very good and comprehensive programme of PSHE within social and religious studies, which is planned well to guide students through school choices and prepares them well for life after school. Advice on the option choices for Year 10 is

good. Students in Year 10 value two weeks of very useful and well-organised work experience. Extended work experience placements are provided for some students who benefit from less academic courses in terms of confidence, attendance and achievement. Students have very good advice on post-16 options including provision outside of school. Advice is based on very good tracking of academic ability and personal development so that individuals are guided onto the most appropriate course for their needs and abilities.

53. Students' views are regularly sought through structured interviews, questionnaires and the school council. Their views have been canvassed on a variety of issues such as personal and social education, work experience, pastoral care and the different learning styles of boys and girls, and these views are taken into account in the development of the school. Students help to set their own personal and academic targets for improvement and this has a good impact on their learning and achievement. Most students feel the school is interested in their views.

Sixth form

54. The same care is taken of the students in the sixth form as in the rest of the school. The excellent relationships between the students and with the staff make all students feel very well supported. Students are pleased with the guidance they had on entry to the sixth form and most feel the courses they are following suit their needs and aspirations. Support, advice and guidance based on monitoring are excellent. Academic progress is very well tracked and students find assessment very helpful so they know how to improve their work. They are confident in seeking help and support. Careers advice is well informed and there is excellent support for university applications. Work experience or work shadowing is encouraged and students are helped to find useful placements.
55. Students' views are valued. They are regularly consulted both formally and informally on course and school development. They have good opportunities to air their views through the sixth form board, which also organises charitable events.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents like the school and support their children's education very well.
- Communication with parents is very good and planners are used very well.
- Sixth form student profiles are very informative and useful.
- Very good links with primary schools help transition to secondary school.
- There are very good links with the local and wider community to widen students' experiences and enhance learning.

Commentary

Main school

56. The school's very good links with parents enable them to support students' education very well. Parents consider this to be a good school, where high expectations and good teaching enable their children to make good progress. They are very pleased with the way their children settle in school and like the range of activities on offer. A small proportion of parents would like more information about their children's progress and some are concerned about bullying. Inspectors found that tackling bullying has a high profile in school and there are very good procedures for dealing with it.
57. The school values its links with parents and regularly provides a good range of useful information. The governing body annual report to parents and the prospectus are good, but do not contain national or local comparisons of public examination results. The website is still in the early stages of construction but is interesting and useful. Students' planners are used very well to monitor progress and communicate with parents. Homework is used well to reinforce and extend the work in the classroom. The vast majority of parents support their children's learning well at home by providing computers and Internet access.
58. Students with special educational needs benefit from links with parents, feeder schools and agencies within the community that are very good overall. Parents are fully involved in review procedures with invitations to comment on reviews and propose targets. Contacts with feeder schools are very productive with a register of needs of incoming students produced well in advance. Links with support agencies within the community are excellent including regular multi-agency meetings held at the school.
59. The school provides good information on students' progress through interim reviews, parental consultation evenings and student profiles. Student profiles are satisfactory, but subject comments are variable in quality. With the exception of Year 9, students' attainment is not compared with national data. A small number of parents do not feel well informed about their children's progress. The school is quick to contact parents when there is a problem and likes to send congratulatory letters as well. Parents are often consulted on issues such as Year 7 induction, careers provision, sex education and student profiles and good account is taken of their views. The majority of parents appreciate this. Places on the governing body are hotly contested. The Parent Teacher Association is a small but dedicated group who support the social and financial life of the school very well and promote closer links between home and school. They provided lockers for students and supported the school's bid for specialist status very well. Parents are very helpful in providing work experience placements for students. The complaints procedure is published and effective.
60. There are very good links with the local and wider community to enhance students' learning, achievement and personal development. A wide range of visits and visitors broadens students' knowledge and social development very effectively; for example, emergency services and representatives of charities raise students' awareness of safety issues and those less fortunate than themselves. There is a very good range of residential and day trips abroad and at home. Students support local and national charities such as the tsunami appeal and the Blue Cross very well. The school has very productive links with the North Yorkshire Business and Education Partnership

and a very good range of useful work experience placements is found locally for students in Years 10 and 12. Very good support and sponsorship were found from local business and industry for the school's specialist mathematics and computing status and they continue to support the school and work-related learning. Members of the community make very good use of the school's facilities to promote lifelong learning. Very good links with the district council support students' learning in the community, for example through the use of the leisure centre, exhibitions and Royal Shakespeare Company drama workshops. The school supports youth work in the community and has very good links with local sporting clubs.

61. The school has very good links with other schools and colleges that make a significant contribution to achievement and personal development. Plans are well advanced to further develop these links through specialist school status. The school has recently become the sports hub for five secondary and 64 primary schools. Work with primary schools is very successful in easing transition from Year 6 to Year 7. Some students do work experience in primary schools. There are good links with secondary schools to enhance sporting provision and, for example, mathematics for gifted and talented students. The school is working closely with local colleges to provide alternative courses and improve choices in Key Stage 4. The school makes an excellent contribution to the training of teachers.

Sixth form

62. The very strong links with the community continue to enhance students' experiences in the sixth form. Very good use is made of the local and wider community to enhance learning through day trips and residential visits. Visitors, such as prisoners convicted of drugs offences, make a significant contribution to students' personal development as they relate the grave difficulties associated with habitual drug use. Members of the local Rotary Club give students useful interview practice. Year 12 students benefit from work experience and work shadowing placements in the local area. Students are very active within the community, especially in their support of charities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. The headteacher's very good leadership, supported by a very good contribution from governors and key staff, has ensured clear direction to the school's development. Governance is very good in nearly all respects but statutory requirements are not met for collective worship, for the provision of ICT in Years 10 and 11 and for the provision of some information to parents.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's vision, energy and ambition for the school, shared by the staff, have helped bring about a very well balanced community that is both happy and achieving well.
- Senior staff and those in other key positions work very well as a team and contribute significantly to the school's leadership.
- Governors know the school very well and play a very effective role in shaping its direction and holding it to account.
- Leadership is very successful in ensuring that students are integrated into school life and receive very good pastoral support and guidance in a very inclusive school.

- Good management procedures ensure that the school's performance is carefully monitored and its best practice in teaching and learning is shared through observation and review.
- The management of the provision in ICT has led to students' achievement being restricted by the current staffing structure and inadequate resources.

Commentary

Main school

63. The headteacher provides very good leadership. He has great energy and drive, and clear ambitious vision and pride in the school. These have helped bring about further improvements to a school that, at the time of the previous inspection, was already judged to be very effective. There are several strands to this success. The principal one is the conviction that every individual has equal value and has therefore an equal right to a good education. Everywhere in the school this conviction is translated into reality to make it a very inclusive school. Students are happy, very well integrated and achieving well. They are polite, positive and well behaved. Their attendance is excellent. Those with disabilities or educational needs are very sensitively provided for and fully included in school life. Students' success is celebrated abundantly through letters of congratulation, excellent classroom displays and copious opportunities for young people to shine through sport, languages and the arts. The ethos for learning is very good. It is an open, enabling culture that builds confidence and self-esteem.
64. This could not have happened without the full co-operation of governors, staff and parents. It is a feature of the headteacher's leadership that he has not only succeeded in sharing his vision with others, but has also managed to enthuse them with it; as a result staff respond well to their collegiate responsibilities. He has the full support and loyalty of the governing body and his strong team of senior managers. At the heart of this co-operation is very effective consultation and clear communications. These have led to a shared understanding and a strong unity of approach among staff that have allowed the headteacher to carry out measures to improve the school, which might otherwise have met with greater resistance. Subject departments that were falling behind the school's high standards have been strengthened; those that suffered from long-term staff absence have been supported.
65. The deputies and assistant heads form a very effective team complementing each other's and the headteacher's strengths and providing very good leadership. Together with heads of subject departments they are strong role models and have an open approachable presence around the school. Through a well-recognised system of oversight and frequent dialogue, senior staff encourage middle managers to analyse and reflect on the work of their areas of responsibility. Annual subject reviews and regular department inspections maintain academic rigour and a high level of accountability in subject leaders. The majority of subject departments enjoy very good leadership and management. This has improved since the previous inspection.
66. Another major strand of the school's success is its very good strategic planning. The school's development plan, combined with the bid document for specialist school status, is a dynamic working document which has at its heart the further raising of standards through teaching and learning, and the improvement of the quality of students' school life. The process of arriving at its aims, closely involving staff and governors and taking into account views of parents and students, brings the school

together with a common goal and is a further example of the inclusive way in which the school does its business.

67. Governance is very good. The governing body has an excellent knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Communication is effected very well through regular reports from individual subjects and the headteacher, supplemented by governors' first hand observation of teaching and learning in the classroom. Governors act very effectively as a critical friend to the school, challenging and supporting senior managers and taking a very active role in holding the school to account for the standards and quality produced. Governors have not ensured that the school fully meets the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship and there is a minor omission in the information the school sends to parents.
68. The school is managed well. Two areas of the school's management detract from otherwise very good effectiveness: the current staffing and resources for ICT need improvement; and target setting in Years 7 to 9 needs to be further developed and embedded in the school's practice. It is testament to the very good leadership that both areas are at the forefront of the school's development planning.
69. The school uses data very effectively to establish how standards and results compare across subjects within the school and how the school compares to other like schools locally and nationally. There is a consistency throughout the school and across subjects in the level of students' achievement and the good quality of teaching and learning. This is the result of very good management practices that ensure not only very good and effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching but also the dissemination and sharing of the best practice in teaching.
70. The senior team and governors have ensured a good curriculum, with care taken to incorporate innovation that is appropriate to the needs and aspirations of students and their parents. The senior management team use data very effectively to review the effectiveness of initiatives taken in terms of their impact on raising standards. The system of subject review by the management team and governors is regular and rigorous and ensures that under-achievement at student and subject levels is identified and tackled effectively. The school's specialist college status in mathematics and computing is being used effectively to promote higher standards in mathematics and to overcome the deficiencies in staffing and resources in ICT. The farsightedness of the governing body as well as the senior team in pursuing this course of action has been central to this process. Students and parents are positive about the manner in which the school is led and managed.
71. The school's senior staff provide very good leadership in ensuring that teachers are aware of equality issues, resulting in very good provision for equality of opportunity in most subjects, with no subjects where provision is unsatisfactory. The school has an equal opportunities policy and policies on dealing with racial discrimination and ensuring racial equality. These are implemented effectively by all staff. Great efforts have been made to tackle differences in the achievement of boys and girls, with the result that the gap has narrowed in recent years. These measures have included conducting a survey of the attitudes of students, parents and staff towards gender issues. The results have been analysed and the outcomes have been incorporated into development plans so that equality of opportunity can be further enhanced. The school's arrangements for ensuring equality of opportunity and monitoring the

progress of different groups are very good overall, due to effective leadership that places a high priority on inclusion and equality of opportunity.

72. Leadership and management of the provision for students with special educational needs are very good. In particular an inclusive philosophy that supports students primarily in mainstream classes has been consistently followed in practice as the main form of provision for a very wide range of special needs. Whole-school review procedures link very effectively and involve key staff in regular oversight and review of students. The development of links with outside agencies has been very effective in providing a very strong multi-agency dimension to provision. The professional development of support staff including the development of their skills and roles has been very effective. The very good provision identified at the previous inspection has been sustained and further enhanced.
73. The school has taken a very positive approach to performance management and procedures are very good. These are fully implemented and are having an increasing impact on raising the standards of teaching and learning. There are very good and effective procedures in place for supporting the professional development of teachers. Priority is given to the training needs associated with the school's development plan, departmental plans and those identified as a result of performance management reviews. The induction of staff new to the school is excellent. All such staff are invited to a wide-ranging programme of meetings on relevant whole-school topics. In addition, newly qualified teachers receive excellent mentoring, support and guidance within departments and from senior managers. The school is also an excellent provider of initial teacher training.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3991613	Balance from previous year	116295
Total expenditure	3862833	Balance carried forward to the next	245075
Expenditure per student	3408.72		

74. Financial planning and management are good. The higher than average surplus last year was accounted for and the balance this year is within the bounds normally found. The principles of best value are applied very effectively and prudently. There are very good processes in place to ensure that the school consults and compares to gain best value in its spending. Educational priorities are costed sufficiently to allow judgements to be made about development priorities. Both the main school and the sixth form provide good value for money.

Sixth form

75. The leadership and the management of the sixth form are both very good. The leadership in the sixth form sets high standards and provides good role models for staff and students. Subject leadership is good overall. In the subjects inspected, leadership is excellent in English and drama, and is very good in business studies and religious studies. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is very good. Students are pleased with the provision they receive and state that the sixth form is well run.

76. Governors, senior staff and contributing teachers share a clear vision of how the sixth form can best serve the students and the local community. This is illustrated in the care and energy expended in ensuring that students entering post-16 education do so where they can study courses that best meet their needs and their aspirations. Thus nearly 20 per cent of Year 11 leavers are guided to more suitable courses offered in other institutions. Where such do not exist, the school provides; for example five Year 12 students are currently studying an ICT course that the school has provided because these students' needs could not be met elsewhere. The tempering of rigorous financial decisions in this case illustrates the stance taken by governors and senior staff to serve the community fully.

77. The sixth form, as in the main school, benefits from the very effective collegiate approach of the senior team to ensure that there is a common aim to drive up standards. The structure ensures good communication between staff and with students. Students and staff experience much the same difficulties in ICT provision as the main school. However, their use of targets and the way in which students are graded in their progress are real strengths. Very good and useful data is produced about students' and subjects' performance to inform decision making and to check on progress being made.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning (WRL)

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good programmes of careers education and guidance and work experience.
- A small number of courses provide very good WRL opportunities for some students.
- Links with the community including businesses and colleges are very good.
- The range of courses on offer that enhance WRL for all students is very limited.
- Planning for and co-ordination of WRL are not currently well established within school management structures.

Commentary

78. In 2004, GCSE results in business studies were above average overall. They were above average for girls and below average for boys. All 12 students completing the 'combined studies' course achieved the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) bronze award with six of those achieving the higher bronze/silver award.
79. Courses on offer in Years 10 and 11 that significantly enhance WRL are few, although the curriculum as a whole provides a satisfactory range of WRL opportunities. GCSE business studies is well established as an option course to all students and provides very good WRL opportunities. Provision has been further enhanced by the introduction of health and social care, currently only in Year 10. Combined studies is a very effective and innovative programme that provides a very varied and stimulating range of vocational opportunities for some students including very good work and college experience.
80. In work seen in the inspection, achievement is good overall and attitudes are very good. Standards were average in two Year 10 health and social care lessons sampled. In business studies they were average in a Year 10 lesson and below average in a Year 11 lesson. In combined studies they were below average. Teaching is good overall. Teaching and learning were good in combined studies, good in one business studies lesson and very good in another. They were good in one health and social care lesson and satisfactory in another.
81. There are very good programmes for careers education and work experience. Careers education and guidance are planned very well with detailed schemes of work. Their delivery is very effective including its integration into the social and religious studies programme. The Connexions service is appropriately involved in working with groups and individuals to provide independent careers advice. The work experience programme is very well organised and administered by the school. ICT has been used very well to develop databases that support the delivery of careers education and work experience programmes.
82. The leadership and management of WRL are satisfactory. An audit of current curriculum provision has been undertaken. Well-established links with the local business/education partnership, local employers and colleges within the region support WRL activities very well. The school has been pro-active and successful in bids for additional funding to enhance WRL opportunities for students. Further

progress is limited by some key factors. The co-ordination and development of WRL are currently under review. A policy statement and planning priorities for future direction have yet to be finalised.

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

The provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good, resulting in very good achievement
- The planning of the taught curriculum is excellent and ensures students receive extensive coverage of the necessary skills.
- The leadership of the subject is very good; the department operates as a very supportive team.
- The students' attitudes to their work are very good.
- Despite some good features in assessment, procedures require more consistent implementation and extension.

Commentary

83. Students enter the school with average standards in English. Results had improved in the end of Year 9 national tests in recent years, but in 2004 they were average and achievement was satisfactory. Students achieved in line with students in similar schools, but results were lower in English than they were in mathematics and science. Significant and unavoidable disruption to staffing undermined the 2004 results. In the 2004 GCSE English examination, the proportion at grades A*-C was above average. This was better than expected given the same students' results at the end of Year 9. In GCSE literature the 2004 proportion at A*-C was well above average, but from an entry that was significantly below the national average.
84. Standards overall in Year 9 are above average. Many students reach well above average standards. Students' achievement during the current Years 7 to 9 is very good, accelerated by the department's renewed stability in staffing since September 2004. The proportion working at level 6 or higher is well above average. Students make good gains in organising their writing into paragraphs, using phrasing and vocabulary that have good impact, and supporting their analysis of a wide range of texts with evidence and examples. Standards are well above average in Year 11. This represents very good achievement. About seven out of ten students are working at a level associated with grades A*-C. Assignments reveal detailed analysis of texts backed up by very good exemplification. The highest attainers bring their own interpretations and appear to revel in the opportunity to grapple with challenging issues such as ambiguity. Very good achievement is also indicated through students showing a genuine sense of inquiry, often initiating their own ideas and questions. The work of lower attainers lacks detail in their response to texts, and their writing lacks organisation and accuracy. Even so, these students achieve very well in relation to their starting points. Very good support programmes, a very good match of tasks to their abilities, and the encouragement of teachers and support assistants help students with special educational needs to make good progress.

85. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the main school. The department now comprises a full and stable complement of teachers who have a very secure command of the subject. Teaching effectively challenges students of all attainments. Lesson planning is very good. Curriculum planning is excellent and ensures extensive coverage of the National Curriculum and the learning objectives of the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy. High expectations result in the students working hard and developing a serious approach to their studies. Teachers make good use of a wide range of resources and so enhance the students' interest. There is very good use of pair and group work. Effective use of more open-ended questioning during whole-class discussions is less secure. Behaviour is very good. Teachers assess work accurately. Comments on work consistently give guidance on how to improve, but there are not enough comments about the strengths of the students' work. During Years 7 to 9 there is some good practice in the use of National Curriculum level criteria to sharpen students' understanding of how to improve, but this is not consistently the case across the whole department. During Years 10 and 11, effective use of GCSE grade criteria and self-assessment help students develop a clear understanding of how to reach their targets. The practice of starting each lesson throughout the school with a silent reading session effectively consolidates the reading habit.
86. Leadership of the department is very good. There is a strong team identity. The head of department has enhanced this by introducing a range of procedures: shared curriculum planning; mentoring of new teachers; and joint lesson observations. Teaching reflects very closely recent developments in the subject. The department is very well managed. Some features of evaluation are very good. Students receive very informed feedback about their strengths and weaknesses in mock examinations. External results are compared with previous years'. However, some evaluation and target-setting procedures, such as comparing the school's results to schools nationally and to schools with similar students, or using a wide range of data to set targets, are not embedded. There are some effective procedures to track students' progress towards targets but good progress does not always result in upwardly revised targets. The trend of improving standards despite disruption to staffing teaching indicates good progress since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

87. Students enter the school with average standards in literacy. They progress to above average by Year 9 and well above average by Year 11. Provision overall is very good because teachers have good awareness of the importance of literacy in learning and teach accordingly. This is an outcome of the school's highly strategic approach to the development of literacy. It has been seen very much as a key component of teaching and learning. Support and direction have been sharply focused, highlighting the use of group discussion, spelling and vocabulary, and extending reading skills. Inspectors consistently observed evidence of the effectiveness of this approach. Students apply the vocabulary of the different subjects consistently in response to their teachers' expectations. One effective feature of provision is the focus on extended writing, as observed in history, religious studies and geography. The team of teachers directing developments in literacy are clear-sighted about where further improvements are needed, for example the development of more effective research skills and more critical use of computer-based sources of information.

Modern foreign languages

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in French have improved significantly and are now above average.
- Students achieve well because of strong teaching and their own very positive attitudes.
- The French department is very well led and managed and has secured improvements in spite of significant amounts of staff absence.
- The department's computerised whiteboard is put to very imaginative use and greatly enhances learning.
- In a few lessons students are not given enough opportunity to practise speaking to reinforce new language they acquire.

Commentary

88. In 2004, GCSE results in French were similar to the national average and students mostly achieved satisfactorily given their prior attainment. All students gained a GCSE grade, though a smaller proportion than average were awarded the highest grades A* and A. Girls did better than boys by the same margin as nationally. These results marked a significant improvement over 2003 when they were well below average.
89. This strong upward trend in standards continues in the classroom. Standards in Year 9 are now above average and students are achieving well. They have unusually good understanding of French because their teachers speak to them consistently in well-accented French. Many use French spontaneously to ask for something and to apologise for being late. This applies as much to boys as it does to girls. Higher attaining students, especially girls, are accurate in their writing and show they can manipulate language by changing tenses and using the rules of grammar they have been taught. The keenest and brightest linguists, however, could be stretched even further by writing more creatively and reading in French for pleasure to enrich the quality of their writing. Students of lower attainment and those with learning needs achieve as well as their peers because they are taught in smaller groups better suited to their way of learning.
90. In contrast to GCSE results in the past two years, standards in Year 11 are above average overall and students continue to achieve well. The greater stability of staffing and the effect of very good leadership have helped to bring about this improvement. The highest attainers have very good grasp of past tenses and use them confidently to describe events in the past. There is scope for giving these abler students even more exposure to richer and more idiomatic language to help them secure the very highest grade. Good practice in building sentences ensures that lower attaining students, some of them with learning needs, are able to make themselves well understood in French, both orally and in writing. All students at this stage have above average comprehension because they hear so much fluently-spoken French. It is a tribute to the quality of teaching that so many students have positive attitudes and behave very well in lessons.
91. Teaching is good and much of it is very good throughout the main school. This leads to good learning in most lessons. Teachers are fluent speakers of French and use it very well in the classroom so that students learn to listen and make sense of what they hear. Lessons start well and are very orderly and well managed. This results in

very good behaviour and a pleasant working rapport between students and teachers. Homework exercises are clearly given and appropriate, though at times the quickest students could be given more to do. The computerised whiteboard is an excellent tool for learning and is used to very imaginative effect to present language and practise building sentences. Marking is good and helps students to improve their work. The practice of seating younger boys and girls together works to the benefit of everybody. In a few otherwise well-taught lessons, the pace of learning loses momentum because teachers give students too little chance to practise new language orally with visual prompts before moving to other activities.

92. As with German, the French department is very well led and managed. Leadership is dynamic, focused and committed to the raising of standards. Teachers work very well with each other and share ideas and resources. It is a measure of the high quality of leadership and the efficiency of management that, in spite of persistent disruptions in staffing over the past two years, morale in the department has improved and standards have risen. Activities outside the timetable such as the languages club, the annual trip to France and correspondence with French pen-friends all contribute to students' achievement and their personal development. The department has addressed the single reservation from the previous inspection and has made good progress since then.

German

Provision in German is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in German are on a rising trend and are now well above average in Year 11.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well because they are taught with unusual flair, challenge and enthusiasm.
- The German department is very well led and managed and has maintained high standards in spite of recent staff absences.
- Students greatly help their own learning through very positive attitudes and very good behaviour.

Commentary

93. In 2004, GCSE results were above average and students mostly did better in German than in their other subjects. All students gained a GCSE grade and an average proportion were awarded the top two grades A* and A. Girls did better than boys by more than the national difference. These results represent good achievement.
94. Standards in Year 9 are above average and students are achieving well. They speak with unusual confidence and often with good German pronunciation. Many use German spontaneously to ask for something or to say they have finished. This applies as much to boys as to girls. Higher attaining students use different tenses with ease to describe events in the past and hopes for the future. Students of lower attainment and those with learning needs achieve equally well, especially in developing their speaking and listening skills. They are taught with the same level of challenge, but in smaller groups better suited to their needs. Many students, particularly girls, write well in

German, too, as they are given ample opportunities to write at length and have a good eye for grammatical accuracy.

95. Standards in Year 11 are well above average and students achieve very well. Students at this stage are all grouped into sets according to their aptitude for German and are all challenged by very demanding and rigorous teaching. Boys and girls have similarly good understanding of spoken German because their teachers are very fluent and use the language abundantly in class. Even those of lower attainment and some with special educational needs speak in well-accented German that is rich in vocabulary. The highest attaining students write accurately using language that is varied and idiomatic. The large majority of students throughout Years 7 to 11 add to their own achievement by real keenness, strong motivation and very good behaviour.
96. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Some teaching is excellent. This leads to very strong learning in most lessons. Teachers are excellent speakers of German and use it nearly all the time so that students have to listen carefully and respond swiftly. In the very best lessons there is a palpable joy in learning. Most of the teaching is very well suited to the ways in which boys learn: clear, lively, humorous and demanding with plenty of pace and movement, lots of visual stimulation and opportunities to be active in speaking. This works equally well with girls who relish the challenge and grow in confidence when the success they experience is praised and leads to a greater willingness to respond. Marking is good with regular reminders of progress and helpful comments on how to improve. The ablest linguists in Years 7, 8 and 9 are well served generally, but could be stretched even further doing homework through reading for pleasure, more creative writing and ICT.
97. The German department is very well led and managed. German teachers, together with their French colleagues, are a very strong team of experienced specialists who work very well together and support each other. For this reason there is an uncommon degree of harmony of good practice among teachers. In spite of recent long-term staff absence, the department has continued to operate efficiently and to maintain its high standards. The head of department systematically reviews performance and monitors the quality of teaching and learning. The department's accommodation, with excellent displays and celebrations of students' work, makes a very good contribution to students' learning. Assessment, too, is very effective in ensuring that students' performance is carefully tracked to keep under-achievement to the minimum. For these reasons the progress German has made since the previous inspection has been good. High standards of teaching and learning have been maintained and the reservation in the previous report about students' insufficient routine use of German has been successfully dealt with.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are well above average.
- Teaching is good so that students learn and achieve well.
- Good leadership provides a clear vision for further improvement.

- Insufficient opportunities are provided for students to use computers to support their learning.
- There is a lack of consistency in the way teachers mark students' work to help them improve further.

Commentary

98. Results in the 2004 Year 9 national tests were well above average, reflecting very good achievement. This group did very well compared to students in schools deemed to be similar on the basis of their attainment on entry to Year 7, and better than in English and science. In the 2004 GCSE examinations results were average. The proportion of students gaining the higher A*/A grades was below average. Students did not perform as well in mathematics as they did in most other subjects studied. Achievement was satisfactory.
99. In Year 9, standards are above average with a significant proportion of students well above average at this stage of their learning. This reflects a group of students with lower attainment than the group who gained well above average results in 2004 national tests. Achievement is good in relation to their earlier learning and their capabilities. The highest attaining students achieve very well. For example, most students recall their tables confidently and handle data effectively and problem-solving skills are being developed well. The highest attaining students understand well the different methods for drawing and interpreting graphs of algebraic equations although lower attaining students are not confident in solving simple equations. In Year 11, standards are above average. Teachers build well on earlier work so that students achieve well. Currently students are attaining higher standards than in recent years because of their improved achievement in Years 7 to 9, which has provided a good basis for accelerated learning. The highest attaining students understand well different methods for solving quadratic equations. Students' problem-solving skills have been developed effectively and as a result students attempt GCSE coursework tasks confidently.
100. The quality of teaching is good throughout the main school and promotes good learning. Teachers use their command of the subject well to ensure that new skills and concepts are clearly explained. Questioning involves students well and provides opportunities for them to share ideas and strategies with each other. As a result, students make good progress with their understanding of new skills. Teachers plan well for the needs of students; tasks are suitably varied and challenging and consequently all students, including those who have special educational needs or who are gifted and talented, make good progress and achieve well. Although ICT activities are planned, there are insufficient opportunities available for students to use computers to support their learning in lessons. The mathematics strand of the government's national initiative in Years 7 to 9 is being implemented well in teachers' planning, although the objectives for lessons and key words are not always used effectively as a focus for learning. Students' attainment is assessed regularly and teachers intervene effectively in students' learning in lessons to check their progress. There is some good practice that points students to ways to improve their work further, but this approach is not followed consistently throughout the department. Teachers manage and organise students well. As a result, students' attitudes to learning are good; they behave well, work productively on their tasks and co-operate well with each other when asked to work together. This is encouraged by the good relationships with the teachers and with each other.
101. Leadership is good and the subject is managed effectively. A clear vision and direction have been provided for the subject. The school's specialist status has improved

staffing, resulting in additional opportunities to support and enrich students' learning. There is a clear commitment by all teachers to work together to get the best from all students. Teachers are well deployed and supported, students are organised effectively and students' performance is analysed and evaluated well. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good; results in the Year 9 national tests have improved significantly, students' achievement is now good, sufficient time is now provided in Years 7 to 9 and tasks are now matched well to students' needs.

Mathematics across the curriculum

102. Students' competency in mathematics is above average and numeracy skills are developed well in mathematics lessons. The school has a written policy for developing students' numeracy skills across the curriculum and most subjects are making a satisfactory contribution to supporting those skills. As a result, students' levels of mathematical skills support well their learning in other subjects and contribute to above average standards.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average by Year 11 as a result of very good teaching allied to the students' very positive attitudes to learning.
- The department is led very well, with a strong emphasis on planning for improvement that has resulted in very good teamwork and rising standards.
- Students use ICT well when carrying out practical work, but teachers do not have enough access to modern computer equipment to enhance the presentation of their lessons.
- Arrangements for monitoring students' progress are very good, allowing challenging targets for improvement to be set. However, the steps to be taken to achieve these improvements are not made sufficiently clear in routine work in lessons.

Commentary

103. Results in the 2004 national tests for Year 9 students were above average and above those in similar schools, continuing a rising trend. There were no significant differences in boys' and girls' results. Results were higher than those in English, but lower than mathematics. This group of students achieved well. GCSE results for 2004 were improved on 2003 and were well above average and well above those in similar schools. Boys' results were above girls' but the difference was not significant when compared to national averages.
104. Standards in recent tests and examinations were mirrored in the work seen during the inspection, which was above average in Years 7 to 9 and well above average in Year 11. Students in all years have a very good grasp of the key ideas underlying their work in biology, chemistry and physics. They carry out practical work confidently and safely, showing appropriate understanding of fair testing and measures to ensure validity and reliability in experimental results. They have good mathematical and communication skills, enabling them to express their ideas clearly and to carry out calculations and graph work effectively. Their ICT skills in, for example, data-logging are also good, despite the outdated equipment that they sometimes have to use. This very good achievement results from very good teaching and the students' very positive attitudes, enabling them to progress from average standards overall on entry to the school to well above average standards by Year 11. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students, often reaching standards that are above expectations.
105. Teaching is consistently good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. This, together with the very positive attitudes that students bring to their work, ensures that learning and achievement are good for younger students and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is able to build on the work of earlier years and accelerate in terms of demand and expectation. As a result, very good teaching is the norm and students' achievement is also boosted. Work is effectively planned to meet the students' needs, with appropriate practical work that is enhanced by good use of computers. For example, a Year 8 lesson seen during the inspection was very well planned to allow students to study insulation using a data-logging technique. Very good use was made of video material to supplement practical work, by posing questions about Scott's Antarctic expeditions. This excellent teaching engaged the students' imagination so that they worked extremely well and achieved highly in this lesson. Teachers have high expectations and work is generally challenging at an appropriate level. Teachers make the most of the students' very good attitudes to work and relationships in lessons are very good, ensuring that effective learning can take place. Systems for monitoring students' progress and setting targets for improvement are very good and most lessons have very clear learning aims, although these do not always link sufficiently into National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades in order to make clear the standards expected. Whilst teachers make good use of the ICT equipment available, much of it is becoming outdated and they have insufficient access to equipment such as data projectors that would aid learning by enhancing the presentation of lessons.
106. The department is very well led and managed and this has helped to raise standards in recent years. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards have risen, teaching has further improved and all the other issues raised

have been tackled. Monitoring procedures are very good, with regular lesson observation and feedback and effective use of assessment data to set targets for improvement. However, monitoring of students' work has not been robust enough to eliminate some inconsistencies in marking and presentation. Planning for improvement is very good and the science staff work well together, with a clear focus on raising standards. This has helped to further improve the quality of provision. The national strategy to raise standards in Years 7 to 9 has been incorporated well into teaching and is beginning to have an impact on teaching methods. The science technicians provide effective support for teaching although they are often stretched due to time constraints and the need to move equipment from one building to another. Although teachers make the most of the accommodation some of it is drab and outdated and does not provide a good learning environment. This is not the case with refurbished laboratories, which are of good quality.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well overall in Years 7 to 9, but limited teaching time in Year 9 hinders better progress, particularly for the most able.
- The minority following a GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 achieve well. Other students receive their ICT through other subjects and achieve satisfactorily.
- The recent acquisition of specialist college status has raised the profile of ICT and well-formulated plans are in place to improve staffing and resources.
- Lower spending than average in past years means there are currently insufficient computers, computer rooms or specialist ICT teachers.
- Management is good but leadership is satisfactory; both are prevented from being better due to the current staffing arrangements.
- The shared teaching of classes hinders continuity of learning.
- Increasing use is made of ICT in other subjects though access to computers is restricted.
- The marking of work is a weakness in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

107. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were above average overall and on a par with the rest in the school. Twice as many boys as girls took the examination. There were too few girls to properly compare boys' and girls' results, but boys attained more high grades. Examination trends cannot be established as few students took a GCSE in ICT in the past.

108. In Year 9, students' attainment is above average. This represents good achievement as they enter the school with skills in ICT that are broadly average. Presentation skills using word-processing, publishing and presentation software are often very good ranging from the mini project, an ABC book for young children, to literature for a mobile 'phone company. Spreadsheet work is particularly well developed both mathematically and with a mind to usefulness; the calculation of areas for floor coverings and associated costs shows a good piece of learning related to business and customer needs.

109. In Year 11, within ICT lessons, standards are average and students achieve satisfactorily. There is only one class and the range of ability is very wide; several students miss one lesson every fortnight to attend work placements. Extensive written and project work is required, which some students find difficult. All work has to be different so 25 individual projects have to be monitored. Students are on track to achieve in line with predicted grades. In Year 10, more students take GCSE than in Year 11, standards are above average and they achieve well. Presentation is not developed much further than in Year 9 as examination criteria do not require it to be, but research, drafting ideas and evaluating how well they meet requirements are developed. The most able students use their better skills in English to do this part of the work more effectively. Spreadsheets are taken much further and the best are full working models with detailed analysis and evaluation. About 40 per cent of students take GCSE ICT, more in Year 10 than in Year 11. Far fewer girls than boys choose to take it. Other students continue to develop ICT skills in other subjects where required and the progress they make is reported, but not formally assessed in all subjects. Overall their competency is adequate to allow them full access to the curriculum and they achieve satisfactorily.
110. Both boys and girls achieve similarly. Students with special educational needs are present in significant numbers in mixed ability classes. Only one learning assistant was seen in ICT lessons during the inspection and she provided capable support to several students and helped them achieve well. Well-prepared schemes of work created and managed by the head of department and very good support provided by class teachers enable students with special educational needs to achieve well.
111. The quality of teaching and of learning is good overall and across all years. Teachers give very clear instructions at the beginning of lessons so students know exactly what to do and this good start is supported well by help-sheets and resources held on computers. Students have very good attitudes to their work and their behaviour is excellent. They are interested, are mostly keen to get on, co-operate well with each other and generally are prepared to do extra work or catch up if necessary after school. Consequently, teachers can use much of the lesson time to support, encourage, and praise students, which leads to all learning effectively. Such one-to-one support provides good ongoing assessment, which leads to a generally good standard of work. The finished work does not receive many teachers' written comments when it is marked and this is a weakness in Years 10 and 11. Teachers can 'take over' students' computers with their own and help students understand new work well by doing so. However, there are currently no computer projectors or interactive whiteboards, which are commonplace aids to teaching and learning. Only one of four ICT rooms is of reasonable size and shape; crowding computers around the edge of rooms hinders learning and teaching. One room is far too hot, and has poor ventilation and should not be used as a classroom.
112. The department is managed well but leadership is satisfactory rather than good because of the current structure of staffing which leads to a very disparate group of teachers constituting the department and leading to difficulties in ensuring clear direction. The head of ICT works hard to pull together his disparate team of 12 teachers; all teach substantially in other subjects, five are heads of department and one is a head of year. In consequence it is difficult to arrange meetings and monitor and moderate work. The head of ICT does provide schemes of work and resources and he does see one lesson of each of his colleagues once per year, so monitoring

and evaluating the quality of teaching. However, the daily interaction and sharing of teaching experiences and methodology, which are commonplace in most departments, do not exist. In addition, too many classes in Year 7 and Year 8 are shared between teachers; in consequence many students see different teachers alternate weeks and this makes continuity in learning harder to maintain. Such sharing does not happen in Year 9 where students receive only one lesson every other week. Though statutory curriculum requirements are met, the depth of work is restricted; there is insufficient time to develop topics sufficiently to enable the most able to attain high standards within the current framework of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy for ICT. The head of department manages most of the teacher assessments of ICT very capably in Year 9 and understands well the need to continue to moderate where necessary and ensure ICT teachers are knowledgeable about current national expectations.

113. Leadership and management have also been hindered by below average spending on ICT over recent years, although staff development has been effective. There was too little access by students to ICT at the time of the previous inspection and, though this has improved, there are still too few computers and insufficient rooms or computer access areas. Though some weaknesses remain, overall improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Some students now take an examination course in Years 10 and 11 and ICT is used more in other subjects. Overall standards and the quality of teaching are similar to what they were. The school recognises that improvement in the ICT curriculum, including staffing, accommodation and resources, is needed and well-formulated plans are in place to tackle these issues.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

114. Improvement in this aspect of ICT is good. Since the previous inspection almost all staff have gone through New Opportunities Fund training and accepted performance-management targets related to using ICT to support teaching and learning. In consequence most staff are prepared for furthering the use of ICT as specialist college funding brings in more resources. In addition staff have received training to help them use interactive whiteboards (screens linked to computers) as they become available in the school. The weakness in staffing the ICT department described above, the many heads of department teaching a few lessons, is actually a strength of provision across the curriculum as such people are more used to ICT than they might have been. At present, computers are used in many subjects though access to them is restricted as there are not enough of them.
115. Low attaining students in Year 10, in lessons in combined studies, take Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) units of work. Inspectors saw them competently searching sites on the Internet. The modern foreign languages department uses an interactive whiteboard well to support teaching, and students' work is also enhanced by time spent on computers in the nearby library. This work is mainly to aid presentation; foreign language websites are not much used. Presentation is also improved with word processing in design and technology, but there is no significant computer-assisted designing or making. In contrast, music has been provided with significant ICT equipment since the previous inspection, which is used well by students to compose music. The mathematics department has good planning in place to use ICT, but too few accessible resources mean not enough is being done at present; ICT teachers do some very good work with spreadsheets in Year 9. Year 8 homework in religious education effectively incorporates research on the Internet.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in Years 7 to 11 and standards have risen steadily.
- Teaching is at least good in all lessons observed and sometimes very good.
- Students show very positive attitudes to the subject and behave very well, helping to make teaching effective.
- Lower attaining students would benefit from a greater emphasis in lessons on literacy skills.
- There is a need to invest further in ICT provision within the department.
- Students' fieldwork is a strength of their work in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

116. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were above average and there has been a steady improvement in results and numbers of students taking the subject in the last three years. Girls performed significantly better than boys in 2004.

117. In Year 9, standards are average and this represents good achievement when compared to their level on entry to the school. Students can use a range of geographical skills to interpret and explain the impact of human activity on the landscape. All students make good use of data, maps and photographs to draw conclusions, for example on the impact of tourism in sensitive environments or the reasons why cities have different land-use zones. Lower attaining students show sound understanding of the topics covered but would benefit from a greater emphasis on literacy skills and a careful explanation of the key words used each lesson. Higher attaining students use extended writing successfully and show an understanding of cause and effect; for example the causes of earthquakes and the devastating effect of an earthquake on the Japanese city of Kobe.

118. Standards in Year 11 are above average and achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Most students write well and show a good understanding of geographical terms. They can explain the problems caused by urban growth and higher attaining students can link physical and human factors to explain industrial location on Teesside. Most students can apply a range of skills to their coursework and use ICT with confidence.

119. The quality of teaching and learning overall is good. Students benefit from a team of specialist teachers who are thoroughly prepared and have good subject knowledge, which is evident in their whole class teaching and in the explanations they give to individual students. Teachers have a good knowledge of their students and use assessment data to track their progress, to identify and address under-achievement and to celebrate good achievement. Students show very positive attitudes to the subject and behave very well, enabling teachers to cover their planned work. Teaching assistants are deployed well in some lessons and make a significant contribution by supporting students with special educational needs so that they are able to keep up

with the pace of the lesson. Teachers set homework regularly and it is well integrated with work done in class. Marking is supportive and helpful.

120. The department is very well led and management is good. The head of department has a clear vision of the contribution to be made by geography to the whole school curriculum. The leadership has ensured the creation of a very effective team with a collegiate approach that maximises the benefits of the differing strengths and contributions of the other teachers in the department. The department has benefited from the installation of some computers in one classroom but needs more and a greater range of subject specific software if ICT is to be used successfully by students in lessons. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards and achievement have risen significantly as has the quality of teaching. Fieldwork, criticised as insufficient, is now a strong feature of the department's work, especially in Years 10 and 11.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good teaching leads to very good achievement by students over their five years in school.
- Very good leadership and management of the department have ensured that high standards have been maintained in difficult circumstances of staff absence.
- Excellent teamwork by departmental staff has continued to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- The history curriculum meets the needs of students and makes an important contribution to their wider development.
- Poor resources hinder the full exploitation of technology to enhance teaching and learning.

Commentary

121. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were well above average. Boys' performance was above that of girls, though the reverse was the case in 2003. Over recent years results have been well above average.
122. In Year 9, students' attainment is above average. This represents good achievement: on entry to the school, students were broadly average in ability but many had limited experience of history. By Year 9, students have a good knowledge and understanding of the main changes in the Industrial Revolution and of the Parliamentary reforms of the nineteenth century. They can research, select information and deploy it effectively, producing detailed accounts and a good standard of structured writing. Students can use and interpret historical sources effectively. Higher attaining students can evaluate sources to check their reliability. In Year 11, standards are well above average and achievement by students of all abilities is very good. Students' knowledge and understanding of the main developments and personalities in the history of medicine are very secure. They can explain cause and consequence, such as the positive and negative factors that led people to migrate to the American West. Their coursework on Pickering Castle is well researched, detailed and very well presented. Students' structured writing is very good and higher attaining students can produce high quality analytical writing. Students use and compare historical sources very effectively; most can use the origin and purpose of a source to determine its reliability or its usefulness to a historian. Students have well-developed skills of discussion and they make confident use of ICT in their research. History teaching consistently promotes students' wider social and moral development through, for example, consideration of attitudes to women in Victorian times and to religious minorities like the Mormons in America.
123. The overall quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good. In these years, teaching by temporary staff is satisfactory but that by the school's permanent staff is very good. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are also very good. Across all years, lessons are consistently well planned with clear objectives which students understand. Teachers have high expectations: students work hard and concentrate very well. Behaviour is consistently very good. Teachers make very effective use of starter activities to engage students' interest and of plenary sessions in order to summarise and to consolidate their learning. Students are challenged and work is very well matched to their different needs, including those of students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented.
124. Occasionally, where teaching is satisfactory, there is too much teacher talk and the pace of the lesson is not brisk enough. In very good lessons, teaching is imaginative and stimulates real enthusiasm. In these lessons, teachers make very good use of artefacts and role-play to make their material vivid and memorable, as in a Year 7 lesson on the Roman army and a Year 10 lesson on surgery before anaesthetics were available. Students' work is marked and assessed regularly and the very good feedback given ensures that students understand their performance, their targets and how they can improve. The skills, which are crucial to success in GCSE examinations, are taught very systematically. Students work very well both independently and collaboratively. Attitudes to the subject are very positive. Book resources are good and the department produces very good materials to match students' different needs. However, the department's accommodation is barely adequate and its own audio-

visual and computer resources are poor; these weaknesses inhibit teachers from making full use of technology to enhance teaching and learning.

125. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. In the difficult circumstances of the head of department's long-term absence, the acting head of the subject has done everything possible to maintain the department's high standards. This includes providing clear vision and direction and a very good role model of professionalism. She is supported by staff who exhibit excellent teamwork and a shared determination to raise standards. Temporary teachers have been very well supported. There are secure systems for monitoring performance and the quality of teaching and learning. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. At that time, the department received a very favourable report. Since then, high standards in examinations and in the quality of teaching have been sustained. The subject has increased in popularity at GCSE level and there have been significant improvements in curriculum and teaching. The lively and interesting history curriculum is a real strength.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at GCSE in 2004 were above average.
- The effect of very good learning is strengthened by students' very good attitudes to the subject.
- Very good leadership and management provide the subject with clear vision and direction and very effective delegation of departmental responsibilities.

Commentary

126. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were above average. The rising trend was sustained with boys and girls doing better than boys and girls nationally, particularly in the highest grades. Results tended to be higher in religious education than in students' other subjects.

127. In Year 9, students' attainment is well above average as they are working on the philosophy and ethics course at GCSE level and are making very good progress. This represents very good achievement as they enter the school with average standards. Higher attaining students give closely reasoned arguments on whether good can come out of evil and are adept at relating the lessons of parables to modern life. Students in Years 7 and 8 follow the locally agreed syllabus for religious education and they gain a very good knowledge and understanding of the main beliefs and practices of Christianity and other world religions such as Judaism, Islam and Sikhism. Students in a lower set in Year 8 made effective use of their recent visit to a Gurdwara in Leeds to identify the ways in which Sikhs show respect and commitment to each other. Standards are also well above average in Year 11 and most students, both boys and girls, achieve very well. Students are very well aware of the different religious beliefs concerning rights and responsibilities for the maintenance and distribution of the world's resources and they work together very confidently in groups

to produce articulate, well-reasoned responses to questions such as those on current environmental initiatives.

128. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers plan their lessons very carefully to provide a variety of activities that keep students alert and interested and to enable them to learn well. For example, they develop their speaking and listening skills through lively question and answer sessions and well-focused group work. Very good classroom relationships have a strong impact on students' learning and achievement as teachers have high expectations of students' work and behaviour and students themselves enjoy the different challenges and respond very positively. Teachers' very good knowledge of students' different needs ensures that all students can take an active part in the lesson and teaching assistants give skilful support where necessary. Resources such as videos and artefacts are used well to stimulate discussion and written work and the regular setting of homework give students the opportunity to consolidate their learning and develop research skills. Assessment is very good. Students are given a very clear understanding of how they are progressing in relation to national criteria and of how can improve their work.
129. The department is very well led, with a very clear vision for development and high aspirations. The social and religious studies curriculum successfully incorporates citizenship and PSHE within the programmes of study and students say that they enjoy the subject. There is a very good match of teachers to the curriculum and staff work together very effectively. Management is also very good, with efficient delegation of responsibility for specific areas of the subject. Resources are satisfactory. There are not enough Buddhist artefacts and the department has rightly identified the need to prepare for the installation of new ICT equipment by identifying and acquiring appropriate resources and receiving training in their use. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and students are now achieving very well.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in the GCSE food technology and graphic products courses.
- The students have very positive attitudes to the subject, which contribute to their good level of achievement in all years.
- Teaching is consistently good with a significant proportion that is very good.
- The two constituent departments are led and managed well, but there is insufficient liaison over matters concerning the curriculum and assessment.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT and computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacture (CAM) to support teaching and learning.

Commentary

130. In 2004, students gained results in their GCSE examinations that were in line with the national average at the higher grades A*-C. The results in food technology and graphic products were above average, and in textiles, electronics and resistant materials, below the average. The attainment of the boys is below that of the girls at the higher grades. Overall, students achieved results in design and technology that were below those achieved in their other subjects.
131. In Year 9, standards are in line with the average. However, achievement is good as the starting point in Year 7 is below average for the majority of students. The standards of the girls are slightly above those of the boys. In general the girls have better developed design skills than the boys. Making and constructional skills in all materials are more highly developed than design skills for the majority of students, particularly the lower attaining students and those with special educational needs. Graphical skills are at expected levels for the majority of students. Higher attaining students have a more secure grasp of subject knowledge and specialist vocabulary. Students are not given enough opportunities to experience computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture, or to use their ICT skills to develop their work.
132. In Year 11, standards are above average and at this stage students are meeting targets that put them on course to achieve results at GCSE above those of 2004. Achievement is good in all areas of the subject; for the higher attaining students it is often very good. The standards achieved by the girls continue to be higher than the boys and many of them achieve very well. Girls' design skills continue to be better developed than those of the boys particularly in the middle to lower attainment band. The work of the girls shows more rigorous research and analysis of their findings when developing their designs. Practical making on all courses continues to be the strongest aspect of the subject for many students, especially the boys. Graphical skills for most middle and higher attaining students are average, as are their subject knowledge and vocabulary.
133. Teaching and learning are good in all years; there is a significant proportion of lessons that are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and skills and use them to plan effective lessons with clear learning objectives. However, the objectives are not always shared with the students and neither is the progress made reviewed at the end of the lesson and therefore these lessons lack the sharp focus usually found. The projects used are varied and interesting to students of all levels of attainment but some of the challenge is lost when time deadlines are not set for the completion of intermediate tasks. Learning resources of good quality are provided to support students' learning. Teachers use a range of methods to engage the students with their learning and questioning, explanations and demonstrations are particularly effective in developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills. In all lessons, teachers give high levels of individual support and well-informed feedback, which aid progress and encourage and motivate the students. The very good behaviour, high levels of concentration and the very positive attitudes of the students add to the impact of the teaching and help to ensure that achievement is usually at least good.
134. Leadership and management of the subject are good. There are two heads of department, one for food and textiles, the other for resistant materials, graphics and electronics, and both give good direction and a clear lead to their teaching teams. Development planning is focused on further raising levels of attainment. However, the planning of the curriculum and the methods used to assess students' work are not co-ordinated across the two areas and as a consequence opportunities to further raise

student achievement are being missed. Accommodation and staffing are good and the technicians are effectively deployed to support the delivery of the curriculum. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. No significant weaknesses were identified. However, the departments have maintained the above average standards achieved by Year 11 and ensured good quality teaching provision.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Drama

135. Drama was sampled. GCSE results in 2004 were well above average. Lessons were observed in Years 7 to 9 and in Year 11. Teaching was very good with some excellent features. The students made very good progress. Standards seen in Years 7 and 8 are average; in Year 11, standards are very high. The subject knowledge and teamwork of the teachers are excellent as is their enthusiasm. These qualities kindle the enthusiasm of the students. Many – boys and girls – engage in drama-based activities in their own time. As well as making very good progress in developing their performance skills, students acquire a very good level of practical understanding of direction and stagecraft. This was consistently revealed through discussions in lessons and in the thoughtful way with which the students approached theoretical work. The folders of students of all attainments in Year 11 show careful attention to detailed analysis of theoretical work. Drama enriches the school experience of many students. There is a full and varied diet of extra-curricular drama. Those students particularly talented in drama have ample opportunity to extend their talents. In addition to productions in school, students perform at festivals, schools and theatres in other parts of the country. The inspection coincided with the production of *Anything Goes*, a performance which provided an immensely enjoyable and memorable evening for students, parents, teachers and inspectors. Drama is a strong feature of the school's provision.

Art and design

The provision for art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Years 7 to 9 as a result of good teaching.
- Achievement is good across all year groups as a result of good teaching.
- Teachers are excellent role models who provide a purposeful climate for learning.
- There are too few opportunities for independence and enrichment within both lessons and homework.

Commentary

136. Teacher assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 show standards to be above those found nationally. GCSE results in 2004 were below the national average. Results have seen some minor fluctuation but generally show an upward trend since the previous inspection.
137. In the work seen, standards in Year 9 are above average. Students achieve well when account is taken of their attainment level on entry into the school. All students achieve well including those with special educational needs. This is because good gains are made as students move up the school. This is a direct result of effective teaching, which focuses on the build up of basic skills, which allow students to explore colour, texture and design on a large scale. This gives students confidence to share their ideas with others and take responsibility when presenting their work in new ways. Students' line drawing and observational skills are well developed and they are able to assess their own work and the work of others successfully. Planning and preparation for class projects are less well developed, however, and there are few opportunities for higher attaining students to experience alternative ways of working or extend their learning beyond the classroom.
138. Standards in the work seen in Year 11 are above average and reflect a higher standard than in previous years. This group of students is a higher attaining group than their predecessors. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching, which focuses on individual support and guidance and adherence to examination deadlines. This clear working structure gives students security and confidence and they are able to exchange ideas openly with their teachers. Students are articulate and creative in their thinking and they can analyse their own work and the work of others very well. Their written work is less well developed particularly when assessing the work of prominent artists or when explaining the impact of their personal research on final art pieces. Good progress is made through research opportunities, which explore a variety of cultures and aid students in their understanding of colour, pattern and design. Although all students make good progress there are too few opportunities for individuals to explore new ways of working beyond the classroom. As a result of this, independent learning opportunities can be missed and may affect some students' access to the highest levels of achievement.
139. The quality of teaching and learning is good. It is often very good. This is because teachers offer a wide range of experiences, which make learning fun. Teachers are

excellent role models who know their students well. They provide them with very good support and guidance and offer additional support at lunchtimes and after school. As a result of this, students are willing participants who enjoy their art lessons. Teachers' subject knowledge and expertise are very good. This allows them to explain difficult processes and concepts clearly and succinctly and as a result students learn quickly. Lessons are planned well with clear aims and objectives and a clear purposeful atmosphere gives students a secure environment for learning. A lively curriculum captures the interest and imagination of students, who benefit from the many opportunities to work in groups and often on large pieces. There are however fewer opportunities for them to work on three-dimensional design or community-based projects. As a result of this students are not always given sufficient independence to explore their own pathways to learning.

140. The department is led and managed well. The head of department has clear vision and provides good leadership. He is committed to raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning and through the meticulous planning of departmental procedures. A revised curriculum ensures depth, variety and progression, allowing pupils to make good progress both within lessons and over time. This has raised the standard of achievement across all year groups and improved the quality of teaching and learning. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The department has recently undergone a period of instability due to absenteeism through illness. However, this has been resolved and the department is now poised to review the curriculum to meet the learning requirements of higher attaining and gifted and talented pupils.

Music

The provision for music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well by the end of Years 9 and 11 due to the very good teaching, and to the very good, and often excellent, attitudes of the students.
- Leadership and management are excellent, and this has led to very good improvement since the previous inspection.
- There is a very good provision for extra-curricular activities, which are of a high quality, attract large numbers of students and enhance the life of the school.

Commentary

141. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were well above average, with the 13 candidates improving upon the good results of the previous year. Teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 showed students attainment to be well above average. This demonstrates very good achievement in relation to prior attainment.

142. In Year 9, students' attainment is well above average. By this point, students have achieved very well, due largely to the very good teaching, and to their own very good attitudes to the subject. Keyboards are used very effectively for composition. Students have command of the necessary techniques, and can compose both in a tightly structured way, and also in a free, creative manner. They can, for example, write 12-bar blues music with considerable flair, and know how to use chromatic dissonances

to provide atmospheric music. In a Year 9 lesson observed, students achieved very well. By the end of the lesson, most could play on the keyboard *I'd like to teach the world to sing*, and could write an appropriate introduction, and many could also add an elementary bass accompaniment. Girls tend to achieve better than boys by the end of Year 9, but boys and girls equally opt to take music in Year 10, and achieve equally well by the end of Year 11. Standards in Year 11 are well above average and students achieve very well. In Year 11, students have very well developed listening skills, making accurate and focused comments when analysing orchestral music. Their composition skills are very well developed as they have a secure knowledge of harmonic development. Students in Years 10 and 11 use music technology very effectively to compose.

143. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. Lessons are prepared in considerable detail, with provision being made to ensure that students of all abilities are able to make good progress in each lesson. The choice of music to be studied is always very appropriate, and leads students to want to learn. Teachers have full knowledge of the musical potential of all students, and encourage them to extend themselves, particularly in practical work. There is always a high degree of challenge. Teachers have secure subject knowledge to prepare examination candidates in Years 10 and 11. They know exactly what the barriers to learning are, and, for example, give very precise directions to students as to what to listen for when they are doing aural and listening tests. Assessment procedures are thorough. For each module of work, full details of levels of attainment are included on worksheets so that students know what they must do to raise their standards. Students clearly enjoy their music lessons, and have very good attitudes in Years 7 to 9, and overall excellent attitudes in Years 10 and 11.
144. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department works very closely with team members, and visiting instrumental and vocal teachers, in order to ensure the maximum musical opportunities for students. There is a very good working ethos in the department, and visiting teachers are made to feel welcome. The specialist college nature of the school has been used well and ten computers have recently been acquired. These are already impacting positively upon standards. There has been very good progress since the previous inspection. Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 have risen. Teaching and learning have improved, and creative work has been developed. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities which are of a very high standard, and which attract large numbers of students. There is also very good provision for students who have special educational needs through carefully focused individual attention with appropriate computer software, and through extra-curricular percussion tuition. The department continues to contribute very strongly to the social and cultural development of students.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2004 were well above average.
- Standards are above average in Year 9 and well above average in Year 11.

- Teachers have very good command of the subject and, as a result, students learn very well and gain new skills and knowledge.
- Students display very good attitudes and behaviour as a result of very good management and their own high levels of interest.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- The changing accommodation for boys is poor.

Commentary

145. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were well above average, as they have been for the past four years. Assessments made by teachers show that standards by the end of Year 9 are above average.
146. In the work seen in Year 9, standards are above average. This reflects good achievement by students in relation to their starting points. Students know appropriate anatomical vocabulary and the reasons why we prepare for activity. Year 9 boys make good use of their skills and knowledge in hockey to devise their own tactics for short corners. Students can analyse their own performance and that of others and suggest ways to improve, especially when using digital video analysis. In Year 11, practical standards are well above average. For example, students in Year 11, including those in GCSE groups, use their very good skills and knowledge of tactics to exploit space in order to outwit their opponent when playing badminton and netball. They are also very effective when analysing performance and evaluating the effectiveness of their tactics. Overall, students achieve very well in Year 11. It was not possible to observe GCSE theory lessons, but teachers' assessments indicate above average levels of attainment.
147. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The good teaching and learning in the earlier years provide a very firm basis for further improvement in Years 10 and 11 in students' achievement, and teaching becomes more challenging. As a result, students gain new skills and knowledge, which they use in tasks that are increasingly challenging. Relationships are very good and teachers and students show each other mutual respect. Students are very aware of the very high expectations that teachers have for behaviour and for the quality of students' work. Consequently, they display excellent attitudes and behaviour in most lessons. In the most effective lessons, teachers enable students to gain more knowledge and understanding through analysis of performance. However, these opportunities are not offered consistently. Teachers focus questions very effectively to elicit qualities of performance from the students, thus enhancing their knowledge. Demonstrations are used well to show students the quality of performance expected, ensuring that their skills are used accurately and with control. Although activities are very well planned, in a minority of lessons there are too many objectives. Consequently, there is insufficient time for students to develop the quality of their skills before moving on to linking and evaluating tasks.
148. The department is led and managed very well. There is a strong commitment and ambition for students to achieve very well in lessons and in the very good range of extra-curricular activities. The department is able to offer a minimum of two hours good quality physical education activities per week to all students in Years 7 to 9 and to many in Years 10 and 11. Senior managers monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning very thoroughly with the result that the department is regarded very

highly. However, there is not enough opportunity for the department to evaluate its own teaching and learning formally, although much is done informally. Students know how well they are doing and how they can improve as target setting and checking on their progress are embedded well. Marking of GCSE practical activities is described by the examination board as excellent. Although the accommodation is mostly very good, the boys' changing facilities are poor and there is no dedicated room for theory work. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, reflected in the quality of teaching and the maintenance of high standards.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Three areas of vocational courses were sampled; business studies, combined studies, and health and social care.

Business studies

149. Two lessons were sampled. Teaching and learning were good in a Year 11 finance lesson. Methods were matched well to examination requirements. Standards were below average, but achievement was good in relation to the group's starting point. In a starter test activity, students' recall of technical terms, including trade credit, retained profit and fixed assets, was good. Lower attainers displayed some weaknesses in interpreting case study data and drawing conclusions from a cash-flow forecast. Higher attainers used the data well to identify key points in the year that indicated cash-flow problems and to propose solutions. Teaching and learning were very good in a Year 10 lesson. Role-play methods were very effective. Achievement was very good and standards were average. In work on human resources management, students' learning about relevant legislation concerning discrimination in the workplace provoked some lively discussion with strongly-held views expressed. Students conducted their own tribunal hearings in small groups based on a real case study. All were involved, in taking the parts of judge, employer and employee. The level of interest was high with excellent attitudes displayed.

Combined studies

150. Two lessons were sampled, one in Year 10 and one in Year 11. Teaching and learning were good in both lessons. Achievement was good and students' attitudes were very good. Standards were below average. In both lessons support staff were very effective in ensuring that individual students with significant needs had full access to lesson activities. Year 10 students were completing personal profiles in preparation for additional work experience placements. They talked enthusiastically about a wide range of challenging activities they had undertaken including experiencing work on a farm and taking part in an 'aerial extreme' team activity. They displayed good knowledge and awareness of both individual and teamwork skills required in the workplace. Year 11 students spoke enthusiastically about the usefulness of the work experience activities completed as part of the course. Students developed further their ICT skills including the use of Internet search engines to locate information. They worked well independently and also supported each other.

Health and social care

151. Two Year 10 lessons were sampled. Standards were average in both lessons and attitudes were good. In one lesson teaching and learning were good. Students

displayed a sound understanding of how different aspects of the environment affect health, growth and development, but had difficulty in analysing problems and thinking how they might be solved. The lesson was well planned and matched to course requirements. Students responded well to high expectations and a challenging pace. Achievement was good. In another lesson, teaching and learning were satisfactory. Students displayed a good understanding of the barriers that may prevent referrals to health, social and other support services. Methods included a good variety of activities including brainstorming and work on a case study, although some tasks were repetitive in their requirement to find and often copy information from the textbook. This did not always assist independent learning. Achievement was satisfactory.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

PSHE was sampled. The planned programme for PSHE is comprehensive and very good. Most of the subject is taught in social and religious studies and in tutorials, but it is supplemented in assemblies, in form time and in other subjects such as health and social care and science. Teaching is good and this results in good learning and achievement. It prepares students very well for adult life. PSHE is highly valued by students and the school. It covers topics that include careers, health, sex and relationships and drug education. Sex education is supported in science and ensures good coverage of this topic. Students value careers education, especially the well-organised programme of work experience in Year 10, and find it helpful in making informed choices throughout their school life and when they leave the school. Careers provision in Years 7 and 8 is sound and advice on option choices for Year 10 is good. Students are given very good and impartial advice on post-16 options.

152. Lessons of PSHE were observed in all year groups. Year 7 learnt effectively about the temptations and dangers of smoking. In a drama lesson they looked at the effect of bullying on the lives of young people. Year 8 considered the factors that make a good relationship. Year 9 students in a social and religious studies lesson looked at the myths and facts associated with smoking cannabis and at personal safety. In a Year 10 tutorial students learnt about the work of the Samaritans and compared it with their own 'Listeners' programme. All Year 11 students attended a session on post-16 options which was taught with the support of Connexions.

Citizenship

The provision for citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are very good, leading to very good achievement and above average standards by the end of Year 9.
- The subject is led well, and there have been thorough procedures for bringing it into the curriculum.
- Links with the local community are very good, and the school demonstrates the values of citizenship through a very responsible attitude towards supporting community-based activities.
- The monitoring and evaluation of the contribution of all subjects to the teaching of citizenship are under-developed.

- Assessment procedures are under-developed.

Commentary

153. The school teaches citizenship principally through subject areas, with additional support within the PSHE programme. Two thorough audits of provision were made, the most recent in the past year. Aspects of citizenship are addressed largely through religious education, English, geography, history and PSHE. However, the 2004 audit revealed that elements of citizenship are included in most other subjects. During the inspection, lessons in which there was a focus upon citizenship were observed in drama, English, geography and religious education across Years 7 to 11. PSHE lessons in all years were observed in which citizenship aspects were included. Overall, these lessons were very good.
154. In the lessons observed within subjects, standards were overall above average. In a Year 7 drama lesson, students made good use of role-play to demonstrate the aspects of perpetrator and victim in a lesson dealing with personal and group responsibility in attitudes to selves and others. Students in a Year 8 geography lesson, dealing with the effectiveness of different ways of bringing about change in society, developed a very good understanding of the difference between asylum seekers and refugees, and were aware of the implications of racial persecution. In a Year 9 English lesson, there was an excellent whole-class discussion on the relevance of identity cards in the community and the relevance of the topic in understanding how and why changes take place in society, and the rights, responsibilities and duties of citizens. When considering near-death experiences, and whether or not there is an after-life, Year 10 students expressed their views with great enthusiasm, and listened to and challenged the opinions of others, revealing a very good understanding of how opinion is formed and expressed. Year 11 students, in a religious education lesson, understood how the human race has been delegated responsibility for its own well-being, and had a good appreciation of how we are mistreating the environment. Students achieve very well in Year 9 because of the richness of contributions from subjects across the curriculum. In Year 11, there is a greater concentration on examination syllabuses, but still sufficient coverage of citizenship to ensure good achievement.
155. Teaching and learning overall are very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The difference is accounted for in the richness of work in the earlier years where teachers are not as constrained by examination courses. A strength of teaching lies in the wide choice of topics used for projects which have appeal for the students and maintain their interest. Teachers demonstrate enthusiasm, and they encourage students to express their opinions, and listen to the views of others. Lessons are usually divided successfully into three parts, often with games-based activities to start the lessons, which immediately raise the interest of the students. Brainstorming exercises and group work activities are always most productive. The department makes very effective use of visiting speakers to enrich citizenship programmes.
156. Leadership is good. There is a clear vision for the development of citizenship and the subject co-ordinator has made thorough provision for statutory requirements to be covered across areas of the curriculum. Management is satisfactory rather than good because arrangements do not allow the co-ordinator to personally monitor and evaluate how well the subject is being taught, other than through reports by subject leaders. Assessment is undertaken but is at an early stage of development; for

example the department is aware that students' self-assessment needs to be developed. The school has well-formulated plans to tackle these two issues. The 'Citizenship Record Book' is an effective record of aspects of citizenship that students cover within subjects and forms a good basis for reporting to parents.

157. The department has developed very strong links with the local community, and this leads to generous sponsorship by local bodies. The school runs citizenship days through which the local education authority, the police, the fire service, and other services are actively involved, reinforcing work on the topic of the role of the voluntary sector. Members of the school community are strongly committed to raising money for charity, as recorded on the many attractive wall displays around the school. Students demonstrate how they are becoming responsible citizens through, for example, membership of the school council, and in Year 10 and above, by becoming part of the 'Listeners' programme, put into place so that older students can help their younger peers. Last year the school won a prestigious BT School Award for its 'Citizenship and Communication Project'. Overall, the school's very positive approach to teaching citizenship reflects the importance attached to the school's central place in this rural community.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, eight 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	5	100	80.1	0.0	23.7	22.0	29.9
Biology	6	60.0	65.2	0.0	11.1	18	20.6
Business studies	4	100.0	76.4	50.0	16.3	40.0	26.2
Chemistry	4	50.0	71.4	0.0	25.0	20.0	24.1
Design and technology	1	100.0	74.9	100.0	15.1	50.0	25.3
Drama	3	66.7	86.5	33.3	19.6	27.0	30.6
English literature	5	100.0	85.9	20.0	19.1	35.0	34.0
Geography	2	100.0	74.3	100.0	19.8	55.0	26.5
German	5	100.0	81.5	40.0	19.3	38.0	28.9
Mathematics	12	25.0	61.9	0.0	17.1	7.5	22.1
Music	2	100.0	86.5	50.0	21.4	45.0	30.7
Physics	6	66.6	68.6	33.3	14.4	25.0	22.7
Religious studies	5	80.0	80.2	0.0	26.0	26.7	29.8

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	21	100	98.3	28.6	50.2	82.9	87.1
Biology	15	100	96.6	6.7	40.0	70.7	79.3
Business studies	15	100	98.9	20.0	39.4	84.0	81.8
Chemistry	5	100	97.7	89.0	50.0	104.0	85.7
Design and technology	2	100	97.8	100	35.0	110.0	77.9
Drama	9	100	99.6	77.8	42.8	100.0	85.1
English literature	23	100	99.4	56.5	44.9	88.7	85.5
French	3	100	99.0	66.7	53.1	93.3	88.9
General studies	11	100	94.9	36.4	30.5	80.0	72.9
Geography	2	100	98.8	0.0	46.4	80.0	85.2
German	6	100	98.6	66.7	49.6	86.7	86.3
History	25	100	99.0	36.0	45.6	79.2	85.1
Mathematics	14	100	96.8	57.0	56.6	88.5	89.5
Music	4	100	98.2	40.0	25.0	70.0	79.5
Physics	7	85.7	96.7	42.9	45.3	71.4	82.6
Religious studies	29	100	99.1	44.8	49.5	86.2	87.4

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	11	100	65.0	18.2	14.6	85.5	60.1
Health and social care	12	100	67.7	0.0	14.5	61.7	63.5

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was English literature. Three lessons of French and German were observed in the sixth form. Year 13 students in French are reaching the very highest A-level standards and are to be entered for the Advanced Extension Award to recognise the excellence of their work. Year 12 students in both languages are achieving well as a result of strong teaching and most have bridged the gulf between GCSE and the more rigorous demands of AS-level.

English literature

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and very good teaching lead to very good learning.
- By Year 13, students are achieving very well and standards are well above average.
- Excellent attitudes of students and varied methods of delivery secure productive and lively lessons.
- Computers are not used sufficiently to underpin learning.

Commentary

158. Results in A2 examinations in 2004 were above average. Results in AS examinations in 2004 were well above average.

159. Standards in Year 12 are above average; they are well above average in Year 13. Students achieve very well over the two years as they build on good achievement in Year 12. Many students, male and female, attain the highest grades. They are confident and perceptive writers and thinkers. They are open to different interpretations of literature and have strong, reasoned, personal responses. They are able to set texts in historical context and understand how this affects the texts they are studying. Written work is detailed, well supported and often sophisticated in its argument. Coursework essays on *Twelfth Night* showed work of a very high standard. Technical terminology is used with assurance. Students have a reasonably wide experience of reading, especially round the synoptic texts, which they bring to bear in their analyses.

160. The quality of teaching is very good, leading to very good learning. Teachers have very high expectations, concentrating on the highest band in the assessment objectives so that they and students strive together for excellence and know how to get there. The students enjoy their course and give exemplary commitment to their studies, both in lessons and at home. The enthusiasm of the teachers is infectious and reveals their expert subject knowledge. The extensive range of methods used by teachers motivates students and keeps them working at a fast pace. Group discussion, paired analysis, drama, empathetic writing and many more approaches are responded to with great vigour. Students are also prepared to draft and redraft work until satisfied it is their best. Computers are used regularly, for research and presentation, but do not sufficiently underpin the teaching and learning process.

161. The department is excellently led. Management provides an excellent role model for both students and teachers. There is a strong team identity within the department and all pull together to provide very effective support for students of all attainments, including the gifted and talented. Management is very good. Rigorous monitoring systems, including helpful reflections by the students on the effectiveness of their course, keep track of the progress of students and standards of teaching. The high standards referred to in the previous report have been improved and innovations in the teaching of A-level successfully introduced. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

MATHEMATICS

The focus of the inspection was mathematics.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of their very good attitudes and the good teaching and support they receive.
- Good leadership and management ensure that teachers' expertise is used well and students' progress is checked and supported very well.
- Opportunities are limited to use computers to support teaching and learning.

Commentary

162. In 2004, GCE A-level examination results were average. Achievement was good in relation to students' capabilities and attainment at the start of the course. AS results were well below average, reflecting the attainment level of the group when they embarked on the course, and demonstrating satisfactory achievement.

163. In work seen during the inspection, standards are average. Students make good progress from the start of their courses. This good progress is the result of teachers' concentration on ensuring that students' basic skills, in particularly algebraic skills, are constantly reinforced during each stage of their work. Highest attaining students in Year 12 understand well how to use logarithms when solving equations. In Year 13, students confidently solve problems involving linear programming. In further mathematics students understand well calculus methods. These examples serve to demonstrate appropriate emphases in the coursework that ensures students' good achievement.

164. Teaching is good, promoting good learning and leading to good achievement in relation to students' standards at the start of their courses and their capabilities. Teachers' very good command of their subject enables them to explain new skills and difficult concepts clearly so that students know how to apply them to a range of questions. Lessons are planned well to provide a variety of suitably challenging tasks, which develop students' learning well and result in students' achieving well. However, limited access to computers results in few opportunities being provided to use them to support teaching and learning. Good day-to-day assessment of students' work supports their learning well, ensuring that students know how well they are doing in relation to examination criteria. Relationships are very good and, as a result, students

show very positive attitudes to their work. They make considerable efforts to understand the work they are doing and teachers provide good support and guidance so that students overcome their difficulties and achieve well.

165. Leadership is good. Very clear direction is provided for the department's work and its development. There is a strong commitment by all teachers to get the very best from all students. Management is good; teachers are deployed well to ensure that their specialist knowledge is used to best advantage and good assessment procedures and planning ensure that students' progress is checked and supported well. These qualities reflect good improvement since the previous inspection, and students continue to make good progress and achieve well.

SCIENCE

The foci of the inspection were biology and chemistry. Physics was sampled in Years 12 and 13. Two physics lessons were observed, one in Year 12 and one in Year 13. Standards in these lessons were average, with students learning and achieving well as a result of good teaching and their positive attitudes to work.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and leads to good achievement.
- Students have very good attitudes to the subject and are well motivated.
- Small group sizes enable students to work together effectively and share ideas.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students, leading to good working atmospheres in lessons.
- The use of ICT is under-developed due to a lack of resources.
- Students do not receive enough practice in examination technique to enable them to make the most of their knowledge and understanding in the synoptic paper.

Commentary

166. Results in the A2 examinations in 2004 were average overall, but very low in the proportion gaining grades A or B. There was some under-achievement among the highest attainers, but satisfactory achievement by the other students.

167. In Year 13, students have good knowledge of the structure and function of the human kidney and showed a high degree of practical skills when dissecting one. Year 12 students are able to explain methods of DNA replication and compare them. Students in both year groups demonstrate good literacy skills and their written work is well presented. During lessons they are keen to make oral contributions and rise to challenging questions. Achievement throughout the course is good in relation to their starting point at the beginning of the sixth form and male and female students make similar progress. Standards seen during the inspection are higher than those indicated by the 2004 results, because current students started with a higher level of attainment than those who sat the 2004 examinations.

168. Teaching is good overall with some very good features and leads to good learning. Teachers have sound subject knowledge enabling them to give clear explanations to help the students learn. Lessons are planned well and organised with a variety of activities to maintain interest. Homework is set regularly and reinforces work covered in lessons. Assessment is rigorous and marking is thorough with guidelines for improvement. Relationships between teachers and students are very good so that they feel at ease to ask for help if they need it. A lack of resources for ICT, such as data-logging equipment, means that students do not benefit as much as they could from the residential field course at the end of Year 12. Although students have plenty of practice with general examination questions they need more specific practice with essay type questions to help them with the synoptic paper. Students have very

positive attitudes towards their studies and enjoy biology as reflected in the recent survey that they completed.

169. Leadership and management are good and the teachers work well as a team to ensure that the students are successful. Assessment and monitoring of teaching and learning are very good and students are well informed of their progress and of what they need to do to improve. Accommodation is good overall, general resources are satisfactory and there is a good departmental library. Retention rates are very good and the subject is gaining in popularity with increasing numbers of students opting for it. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. There has been an overall upward trend in results apart from 2004 and initiatives are in place to continue to improve results such as the new 'statistics for biologists' course and some strategies to improve examination technique.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and learning.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their studies, which enhance their learning.
- Standards are above average.
- There are very good working relationships during lessons.
- The large group size in Year 12 has implications for practical work.
- There is insufficient use of ICT due to a lack of resources.

Commentary

170. Results in the A2 examinations in 2004 were well above average. All students achieved a pass and four of the five candidates gained A/B grades. This represents very good achievement in relation to their starting point at the beginning of the sixth form. These results are better than those for the year 2003.

171. In Year 13 students show a good understanding of structures and bonding and are able to carry out molecular calculations with accuracy. In Year 12 students are able to explain the role of catalysts and their effects on chemical reactions. Literacy and numeracy skills are good in both year groups. Work is well presented and students demonstrate good practical skills in their handling of equipment and chemicals. Achievement is good in relation to their starting point at the beginning of Year 12. Boys and girls make similar progress.

172. The quality of teaching is good overall with some very good features so that good learning and achievement take place, which is also helped by the very positive attitudes of the students. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which enables them to clearly explain difficult concepts to help students' understanding. There are very good relationships between teachers and students, so that students are not afraid to ask for help. Lessons have a variety of activities and students experience a lot of practical work, which they enjoy, but sometimes this has to be limited in Year 12 because of the large group size. The well-planned lessons always provide extension work for the more able students. There is very good support for a student with special

educational needs. Teachers have high expectations and ask challenging questions to reinforce knowledge and understanding. Homework is set on a regular basis and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons. Marking and assessment are thorough with clear guidance on improvement and students are well aware of their progress. ICT is underused in the department due to a lack of resources. The recent student survey indicates that they enjoy chemistry.

173. Leadership and management of the department are good. Assessment and monitoring of teaching and learning are very good and teachers work well together to ensure the continuation of good examination results. Accommodation and resources, apart from ICT equipment, are satisfactory and there is a large departmental library of books and videos which the students can borrow. The department receives good technical support. Retention rates are very good and improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Results have been consistently above average and new initiatives are underway to maintain this, such as the 'maths for chemists' course and the subject is increasing in popularity.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT was sampled. There are two courses, both in Year 12. The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course is taken one lesson each week by all students not following the GNVQ course. There are currently five students following the GNVQ intermediate course. There are no advanced courses available to students in this school. Year 11 students wishing to pursue such courses are guided to other providers locally. Students with a C grade or better at GCSE already have a higher standard in ICT than the ECDL requires them to reach and should be advancing their skills further. The school recognises this and has plans to develop further post-16 courses, in line with the development plan that underpins the school's accreditation as a specialist mathematics and computing college. Other sixth form students with a grade C or better in GCSE ICT do not have to follow the ECDL course but some choose to do so as it provides an additional qualification.

Commentary

The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course

174. The ECDL course was introduced in the school last September with a part-time supply teacher engaged to teach and manage it. Two lessons were seen during the inspection. Both were good. Teaching styles were very different, one focusing on teaching specific ICT skills, while in the other the teacher supported a variety of individual work and students being assessed in their coursework; assessment is done on line. The manager of the course is very organised and understands the course thoroughly. Students spoken to were enthusiastic about the work they were doing. Students took key skills tests in 2004, which has been replaced in its ICT component by the ECDL. Some 82 per cent of students taking level 2 passed; 90 per cent of those taking level 3 passed, reflecting good achievement.

GNVQ ICT

175. In 2004, two students took a foundation GNVQ and attained pass grades, equivalent to four GCSE grades at F to G. Four students took intermediate GNVQ and attained

pass grades equivalent to four GCSE grades at C. Prior attainment data available indicates these students achieved well.

176. Due to the timetable and the days in which the inspection took place, only one lesson was seen, in which students' work was also scrutinised. In the work seen, standards broadly meet expectations; spreadsheet work is on a par with current middle attaining GCSE students. Achievement in ICT is good. Some students have particularly well-developed skills in other aspects of ICT, which they have learnt outside their lessons in ICT. Teaching and learning are good. They are helped by the excellent attitudes of students who want to do well. The teacher is knowledgeable about the requirements of the course and set a good pace, requiring students to complete tasks within a given period. Consequently students got down to work and strove to complete it before the next stage. The teacher asked questions to challenge students and kept them on their toes and, importantly, reinforced and refreshed students' knowledge and understanding. Coursework is up to date and generally completed appropriately. Marking follows examination board criteria. Students have work placements, which will take up one day each week, but these are not yet operating and could not be inspected.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on religious studies. Work was sampled in history and geography. In the history lesson sampled, teaching and learning were very good. Teaching was challenging and had a very clear focus on the skills essential for success in examinations. Students' attainment was well above average. The sampling of geography is based on one Year 12 lesson observation, a scrutiny of students' work in the lesson and an analysis of recent results. The subject is becoming an increasingly popular A-level option with 18 students now taking AS and 11 taking A2. Standards are above average and achievement is very good. Teaching is excellent and learning highly effective because the teacher encourages independent learning. Students work highly effectively together.

Religious studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a very good take-up for the subject in the sixth form and students achieve very well.
- Leadership and the quality of teaching result in very good learning.
- Results in A-level examinations were above average for the proportion of male students attaining grades A or B.
- There are not enough textbooks for students to have their own copy.

Commentary

177. Results in the AS examination in 2004 were above average. Results in the A-level examination were average. All candidates gained grades A-E and male students achieved particularly well in the higher grades.

178. Overall standards on entry to the sixth form are about average. Students in Year 12 achieve well from this starting point and attain above average standards. There is a wide range of attainment in the year group because the subject is a very popular choice. Students follow an examination course in philosophy and ethics. In Year 13, standards of work are above average overall. However, many are working at a level well above average, and the group as a whole achieve very well in response to the very good teaching they receive. They have developed good skills of intellectual inquiry so that they ask intelligent questions and work out the logic of the argument for themselves. Higher attaining students formulate their ideas very quickly and express them cogently and eloquently. Students of all levels of attainment have very mature attitudes to their work. They listen intently and concentrate very well when getting to grips with difficult concepts. They are confident in discussion, amplifying ideas and evaluating different aspects of the argument. Students' written work shows evidence of good independent learning in the form of personal research, incorporating the use of a range of reference books as well as the Internet.

179. The quality of teaching is very good and results in very good learning. There are no significant weaknesses. Students benefit from being taught by different teachers for the two strands of their course. Thus they experience a range of teaching styles and approaches and very high levels of expertise and challenge. A main strength of the teaching is the very effective planning through which students are moved along step by step to grasp the significance of

philosophical ideas and the logic behind them. Students obviously enjoy their lessons because classroom relationships are very good, with mutual trust and good humour shown in discussions. Assessment and evaluation are very thorough and innovative. Students gain a very clear understanding of how they are progressing and how they can improve their work. The responses to the student questionnaire enable teachers to appreciate the strengths of the provision and identify any areas for development, such as the need for individual textbooks.

180. Leadership and management are very good. Staff work together very well as a team and students value the time that teachers spend on revision sessions. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection in that many more students now opt to take the course and achievement is very good. Students benefit from the talks given by visiting speakers as part of the religious education component within the general studies course and from the opportunities to take part in seminars when attending a local sixth form conference.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was drama. One lesson of art and design was seen in each of Years 12 and 13. Both contained good teaching which focused on excellent demonstration and particularly good explanation of painting techniques. This gave students the confidence to critically assess the work of prominent artists and led to good learning and achievement. Standards are broadly average in Year 12 and above average in Year 13.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership inspires students and teachers, leading to very good achievement.
- Wide-ranging opportunities outside the normal curriculum extend students' experiences, leading to very good learning.
- The excellent attitudes of students and very good teaching secure high standards.

Commentary

181. Results in the A2 examinations in 2004 were well above average and students did better in drama than in their other subjects. Results in AS examinations were above average.
182. Standards in Year 12 are above average. In Year 13, they are well above average. Students improve considerably in confidence in their own ideas for directing and performing during the course and develop into mature performers and critics. Achievement is very good. Students visit the theatre regularly and are involved in putting on many shows within school, ensuring they develop a very good understanding of stagecraft. The excellent production of *Anything Goes*, staged during the inspection, was a good example of this. Students are very good at evaluating and criticising their own and others' performances and are very aware of the effect on the audience. This reflects the excellent relationships fostered within the groups where all, teachers and students, work together to attain the highest standards, and the excellent

attitudes students have towards their work. Standards are especially high in the area of technical staging, including set design, construction and purpose. Knowledge of theory such as Stanislavsky's is very high and written work is detailed and accurate. Some lower attainers are less confident in expressing their emotions.

183. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, both practical and theoretical, which is conveyed with great enthusiasm, motivating students to confident response. Assessment is very good, with constant reinforcement of how to improve from teachers and constant focus on students' self-criticism. The course is very well planned, giving students ample opportunity for independent development. For instance, in Year 12, each student has the chance to direct the group in a performance. Students enjoy their drama immensely and give total commitment. Many go on to extend their study of drama in some way when they leave and are given very good support. All Year 13, for instance, contributed to a lesson focused on supporting a student in his imminent university interview. Boys and girls achieve very well. Gifted and talented students have many and varied opportunities to develop their talents.

184. The quality of leadership is excellent and provides an excellent role model for teachers and students. Very good monitoring of teaching and learning has helped to sustain the high standards reported in the previous inspection report. The contribution of drama to the extra-curricular life of the school continues to be excellent.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

One Year 12 AVCE lesson in health and social care was sampled. Teaching and learning were good and standards were average. Students worked in groups to conduct a 'wheelchair audit' of the school building. They displayed very positive attitudes and achievement was good. One lesson of physical education was sampled in the sixth form. Evidence from the observation and discussions with students indicates that they are very well taught and are achieving much better than they expected. Standards are above average.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was A-level and AVCE business studies.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The two courses offered ensure that the curriculum is well matched to a wide range of needs.
- Achievement is good because teaching and learning are characterised by a 'real world' emphasis and a wide variety of learning opportunities.
- School and departmental systems are used very well to monitor students' progress.
- There is a very strong team commitment to sharing ideas and good practice.
- The impact of planning is limited by a lack of focus on specific targets and marking does not give students consistent feedback on how to improve.
- The lack of ICT equipment is a barrier to the further development of teaching and learning styles.

- Literacy is an area of weakness for some VCE students.

Commentary

185. Both A-level and AVCE results were above average in 2004, representing good achievement for those groups of students from broadly average starting points. There were no significant differences between male and female students' results.
186. In the work seen in Year 13 standards are average. The achievement of both current Year 12 and Year 13 students is good, from below average starting points. In students' writing, analysis is stronger than evaluation, except for higher attainers. Both A-level and AVCE students apply theoretical models to real business situations. A-level students distinguish between strategy and tactics in examples of marketing decision-making and AVCE students apply the concept of product life-cycle to a range of products. AVCE students display good skills in business investigations. A-level students use technical terms well to compare and contrast different forms of business organisation. Numeracy skills are a weaker area for some lower attaining A-level students. There are also some weaknesses in writing technique in interpreting questions requiring a balanced argument and reasoned conclusion. Literacy is an area of weakness for some AVCE students, including knowledge of business vocabulary and abstract concepts.
187. Teaching and learning are good; there is a significant amount of very good teaching. Teachers use their sound subject knowledge and a variety of methods to strike an effective balance between challenge and building confidence. There is good knowledge of individual students and they are suitably encouraged and thus gain confidence in their own learning, a key factor given the wide range of prior attainment of students choosing business studies. Students display very positive attitudes. They respond very well to methods that have a real-world emphasis and where there is 'learning by doing'. AVCE students, for example, are currently undertaking a team task involving the launch of a real business enterprise in the community. In A-level teaching, there is a strong emphasis on practising methods required for examinations and students gain a good knowledge of potential errors when practising examination questions. Course requirements are constantly emphasised. AVCE students know what they have to achieve to reach specified grade criteria. Class discussion effectively involves and engages students. However, in some discussion activities there is too much reliance on volunteers, with opportunities lost to check individuals' understanding. Marking does not consistently provide students with feedback on how to improve.
188. Leadership is very good. There is a very strong sense of direction. The departmental team work very effectively together. The department has been very successful in developing provision for students with a wide range of prior attainment. Management is good rather than very good because although there is a very clear strategy for improvement, planned priorities lack sufficient focus on what action is required and by whom. The monitoring of individual progress is very thorough with very good use made of whole-school and departmental systems. Although there is a very clear strategy for improvement, planning priorities lack focus on what action is required. The lack of ICT equipment in teaching rooms limits opportunities to use ICT in teaching and learning. There was no separate report for post-16 business studies at the previous inspection. Progress since that time has been good with new course requirements successfully established.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

189. General studies provision was sampled. One Year 13 general studies lesson, on the subject of politics, was observed during the inspection. Teaching and learning were very good and the teacher worked effectively to help the students to develop an understanding of local and national politics. Students were interested and keen to learn and gained a good understanding of how they can influence political decisions. Achievement was very good.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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