

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **WESTCLIFF HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS**

Westcliff-on-Sea

LEA area: Southend

Unique reference number: 115317

Headteacher: Mr A J Baker

Lead inspector: Romy Markham

Dates of inspection: 7 - 11 February 2005

Inspection number: 269004

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll:	996
School address:	Kenilworth Gardens Westcliff-on-Sea Essex
Postcode:	SS0 0BP
Telephone number:	01702 475443
Fax number:	01702 470495
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Ian Croxford QC
Date of previous inspection:	19 April 1999

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Westcliff High School for Boys provides grammar school education for 994 boys aged 11 to 18. Entry to the school is made on the basis of selection tests and standards on entry overall are above those found in most secondary schools. The school aims to offer places to the most able 25 per cent of the year group; this is much wider than many other grammar schools. The pupils are predominantly White British; in 2004, 15 per cent of pupils had African, Caribbean, Asian, Chinese or mixed ethnicity; very few have English as an additional language. The school population is very stable; there are no travellers or refugees and very few pupils with any form of special educational need. Although the school is in an advantaged socio-economic area, more than half of the pupils on roll live outside the borough. The sixth form is larger than most sixth forms nationally; there were 234 students on roll in 2004, almost all preparing for application to higher education. A small number of courses in the sixth form are shared with the adjacent grammar school for girls. Standards on entry to the sixth form are well above the average for sixth forms nationally. The school was designated a Beacon school in 2000 and gained the Sportsmark in 2002.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1387	R Markham	Lead inspector	
19727	E Langford	Lay inspector	
30941	K Brammer	Team inspector	English; English as an additional language
23526	A Bird	Team inspector	Mathematics
	R Jardine	Team inspector	Science 11-16; chemistry 16-18
11258	I Rushforth	Team inspector	Art and design; design and technology
18076	H Dodd	Team inspector	Information and communication technology 11-16; biology 16-18
22953	P Dacombe	Team inspector	French
17530	M Cureton	Team inspector	Religious education; citizenship
7465	R Brent	Team inspector	History
24026	C Holland	Team inspector	Music
25748	R Moyle	Team inspector	Physical education
30743	N Cowell	Team inspector	Geography; special educational needs
30072	J Skivington	Team inspector	Psychology

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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>11</b>
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>18</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>WORK-RELATED LEARNING</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>68</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The overall effectiveness of the school is very good.** The school has many excellent features and key strengths in combining high quality academic provision with outstanding opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils and students achieve very well, supported by very good teaching and their own very positive attitudes. The school is very well led and gives very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils reach very high standards and are very well prepared for entry to higher education.
- Standards and achievement in English by the end of Year 9 are significantly lower than those in mathematics and science and test results are below those of similar schools.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, in response to the high priority given to it by the school, supported by the pupils' very good behaviour and attitudes.
- Teaching is very good and promotes very good learning and achievement.
- There is an outstanding programme of extra-curricular activities.
- The school has developed excellent induction arrangements so that pupils settle quickly.
- There is excellent strategic planning to reflect the school's aims and objectives, driven by the very clear vision for the school from the headteacher.
- Standards in ICT in Years 10 and 11 are not as high as in other subjects, and ICT is not used enough in some other subjects.
- Facilities for the sixth form do not always meet the needs of young adults.
- Provision for work-related learning and collective worship does not fully meet statutory requirements.

The school has made good improvement since the last inspection report. Standards in external examinations remain very high at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. There has been good improvement in respect of provision for pupils with special educational needs, assessment and staff development.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A\* – top 5%; A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average  
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

**Pupils achieve very well** by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils make and sustain very good gains in their learning and reach very high standards in national tests and GCSE examinations.

Results overall are better than those of schools with similar intakes and broadly similar to other grammar schools. The trend of improvement is better than the national trend. Within this overall picture, however, Year 9 test results in English are noticeably weaker than other subjects and results in similar schools. Standards seen during the inspection were well above average in Year 9 and Year 11 and achievement was very good. Pupils were well on course to reach high standards in examinations, helped by the intensive revision and preparation programme provided by the school. Standards in Year 9 were well above average in English and better than the 2004 test results, in response to recent improvements in provision. Standards were very high in science and well above average in all other subjects, except music and physical education, where they were above average. In Year 11, standards were very high in science and well above average in all other subjects except ICT and art, where they were above average. Standards seen in the sixth form were well above those of sixth forms nationally and achievement was very good as students consistently maintained high levels of performance. Pupils and students have well above average literacy and numeracy skills, which helps their achievements in other subjects. They have good skills in using ICT, with particular strengths in the use of databases and presentational software.

**The pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good.** Attitudes and attendance are very good. Relationships and racial harmony are very good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The overall quality of education is very good. Teaching and learning are very good** throughout the school and assessment is good. The curriculum is good and provides well for all pupils. Learning opportunities are considerably enhanced by the outstanding range and quality of enrichment and extra-curricular activities planned throughout the year. There are very effective systems for care and welfare.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**The overall quality of leadership and management is very good.** The headteacher and governing body provide a very clear educational direction for the school. The leadership of other key staff is very good. Management is good but systems for evaluating the progress of pupils and students do not make best use of available subject specific benchmarks. Despite having many strengths, the governing body has not ensured that all statutory requirements are met. Pupils do not have the opportunity to attend collective worship each day, as the law requires, although this is not affecting their personal development. There are limited opportunities for work-related learning in Years 10 and 11, so that not all pupils receive their entitlement. The school is in the process of improving this provision.

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

Parents are very positive about the work of the school. They value the high standards of achievement, behaviour and discipline. Some are concerned about the limited amount of vocational education. Inspectors found that the school is responding positively to these views. Almost all pupils think that this is a good school, especially the very good teaching. In questionnaire returns, one in four pupils said they would not talk with an adult in the school if they had a personal problem. In discussions with inspectors, however, pupils confirmed that there is very little bullying, but where it arises they are confident in telling staff, who deal with it promptly and firmly.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

This is already a high performing school. In order to develop further the most important things the school should do are:

- Continue to improve provision for English in Years 7 to 9 and ICT in Years 10 to 11 so that standards reach those of other subjects and, in English, are comparable to those of similar schools.
- Improve facilities for the sixth form.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Ensure that all pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive their entitlement to work-related learning and their achievements in this area are reported to their parents.
- Ensure that there are alternative opportunities for collective worship for pupils on the one day each week when they do not attend whole school assemblies.



## THE SIXTH FORM AT WESTCLIFF HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The sixth form is very effective;** teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well. Provision is very cost effective; although standards are well above average on entry, students improve even further, at average cost. The sixth form is very well led and overall makes a significant contribution to the life and work of the school.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve very well and reach very high standards in external examinations.
- The school prepares students very well for application to higher education.
- Facilities for sixth form students do not always reflect their status as young adults.

### 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	<p><b>English literature:</b> Provision is <b>very good</b>. Standards are well above average. Students achieve very well because of very good teaching and their own maturity, commitment and enthusiasm.</p> <p>The combined <b>English language and literature</b> course was sampled. A-level results are consistently above average. In the lessons seen, achievement was very good.</p> <p><b>French:</b> Provision is <b>very good</b>. Teaching and learning are very good. Very good leadership and management have improved recruitment and raised standards.</p>
Mathematics	<p><b>Mathematics:</b> Provision is <b>very good</b>. Students achieve well in response to very good teaching.</p> <p>Work was sampled in <b>further mathematics</b>. Standards at A-level are very high and in the lessons seen teaching and learning were very good.</p>
Information and communication technology	<p><b>ICT</b> in the sixth form was sampled. In the lessons seen, teaching was good; students achieve well and standards are well above average.</p>
Humanities	<p><b>History:</b> Provision is <b>very good</b>. Very good teaching encourages students and they achieve very well.</p> <p><b>Psychology:</b> Provision is <b>good</b>. Standards are above average and achievement is good because of good teaching and learning.</p> <p><b>Geography:</b> Provision is <b>very good</b>. Students achieve well; teaching and learning are very good and standards are well above average.</p> <p>Work was sampled in <b>geology</b>. Students make excellent progress, building on the well above average attainment in GCSE geology. Standards are very high at AS-level and at A-level.</p> <p>In the sample of work seen in <b>religious education</b>, teaching and learning were very good. Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.</p> <p>In the sample of work seen in <b>politics</b>, standards were well above average and teaching and learning were very good.</p>

Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Not inspected.
Visual and performing arts and media	Work was sampled in <b>art and design</b> . Standards are well above average. Teaching and learning are good.  In the work seen in <b>music</b> standards were above average and students achieved very well. Teaching and learning were very good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<b>Physical education:</b> Provision is <b>very good</b> . Students achieve very well and A-level results are consistently very high.
Business	Not inspected.
Health and social care	Not inspected.
General education	Results in A-level <b>general studies</b> have been above average in the last three years and numbers achieving the highest grades are rising. In the sample seen, teaching and learning are good.

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

## ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students of all ethnic backgrounds and different capabilities receive very good advice, support and guidance that help them to seek high standards in academic work. Students agree targets and review their work regularly with their tutors. Students are very well supported in their applications to higher education. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good because provision is planned carefully in the curriculum and in the ethos of the sixth form, as in the main school. Relationships between students and staff are very good. There are, however, relatively few opportunities for meetings to discuss pastoral concerns.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

**Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.** The newly appointed head of sixth form is developing very effective systems to coordinate the work of subject and form tutors and setting a clear direction for further improvement. Governors are keen to develop the sixth form and they keep very well informed about all aspects of the work of the sixth form including standards, staffing and the curriculum. Shared provision with the adjoining school is managed satisfactorily.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Sixth form students are mostly positive in their views about the sixth form; they feel they are well supported and that they receive high quality learning opportunities. However, many students expressed a concern that there is a distinct lack of a sixth form identity to mark them out to others during their time in the school. Students are concerned about the poor condition of the sixth form common room and the lack of specific sixth form teaching rooms and private study areas. Inspectors agree with these views. Some students would like more access to external careers guidance to better inform their future employment decision making, particularly those not going on to higher education studies.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in subjects and courses**

Achievement is very good in all years. Pupils make and maintain very good gains in their learning. Standards are very high in national tests and examinations. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language receive very good support and they achieve as well as other pupils. There is no significant difference in achievement between pupils from different ethnic groups.

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

- GCSE results in 2004 were better than those of similar schools.
- Achievement and national test results at the end of Year 9 are noticeably lower in English than in mathematics and science.
- The achievements of gifted and talented pupils and students are outstanding.
- Standards in ICT in Year 11 are not as high as in other subjects.

#### **Commentary**

1. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2004, results were very high, in the top five per cent nationally, overall and for each of English, mathematics and science. Results have been consistently very high since 2000. Results in 2004 were well above those of schools with a similar level of attainment on entry. Within this overall picture however, results in English were significantly weaker than other subjects and were below the average for similar schools. When results are compared to those of other grammar schools in similar contexts, based on known eligibility for free school meals, pupils did better than average overall, with well above average results in mathematics and science but well below average results in English. The proportion of the year group having the highest standards (Level 7 and above) was well below those of other grammar schools in English and mathematics and below in science, reflecting the much wider ability range in this school compared with most other grammar schools.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	43.1 (45.5)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	46.0 (46.1)	35.4 (34.7)
science	43.0 (43.0)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 150 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

2. GCSE results in 2004 were very high, in the top five per cent nationally. When compared with schools with similar intake profiles, results were above average for the proportion achieving grades A\*-C and the average point score achieved. When results are compared with other grammar schools in similar contexts, based on eligibility for free school meals, results are broadly average. Results have been consistently very high since 2000. In 2004 the results matched the statutory target of 99 per cent higher grades. When patterns of individuals' results in 2004 are examined, pupils tended to do

better in French, geography, German, mathematics and statistics than in their other subjects. They did relatively less well in double award science, English language and history than in their other subjects.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	98 (98)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (99)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	53.1 (53.8)	34.7 (34.8)

*There were 150 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. From lesson observations, work seen and other inspection evidence, standards are well above average overall. Standards are already very high indeed in science in Year 9 and in science and the GCSE physical education course in Year 11. Standards are above average in physical education and music in Year 9 as pupils enter the school with very mixed experiences in these subjects and broadly average standards. Unusually, standards in ICT are well above average in Year 9 but only above average in Year 11, reflecting recent improvements in provision in Years 7 to 9. In most other subjects, standards are well above average. The school provides a rigorous examination preparation and revision programme, so that pupils are well on course to gain very high results in tests and examinations.
4. Pupils achieve very well during their time in school. They make rapid progress in their knowledge and understanding and build very well on the above average standards they had on entry. A significant feature is how well pupils make progress with subjects that are new to them, for example French or German. Their learning is very well promoted by their very good basic skills and their strong personal motivation. Gifted and talented pupils achieve particularly well as their specific talents are recognised and catered for. Achievement in English is good in Year 9 and Year 11, but not as good as in mathematics and science, where it is very good. Writing is the weakest area of English. Although achievement in ICT is satisfactory overall, pupils in Years 10 and 11 have not made the overall progress they should because they did not have sufficient time to develop their skills in Years 7 to 9. The achievement of the very small number of pupils with special educational needs is very good. They make the same very good progress as other pupils because teachers understand their needs and are careful to meet them. When necessary, pupils are supported in classes by teaching assistants or teachers. Pupils with English as an additional language are very well supported and they make the same very good achievement as their peers.
5. The pupils' literacy skills are above average when they enter the school. Standards are well above average in Years 9 and 11. Speaking and listening skills are very high. Pupils work very well together, using talk to solve problems, to evaluate, to debate and make decisions and to share, develop and refine their ideas. Reading comprehension is also of a high standard because teachers stress the importance of these skills as well as reading for information. Standards of writing are well above average: however, there are some weaknesses in presentation and the technical accuracy of writing in all years. There is no whole school policy on numeracy though standards in national tests and examinations indicate that pupils' competence in mathematics across the curriculum is very good and is not a barrier to learning. Pupils have good skills in using ICT, with particular strengths in the use of databases and presentational software.

### **Sixth form**

6. In 2004 the A-level and AS-level results were well above national figures; over the last three years, results have on average been very high, in the top five per cent nationally. During this time biology, music, chemistry and psychology were weaker subjects in the proportion of A and B grades, while further mathematics, art, physical education, geography and English were strong performers.

**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	97.2(97.6)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	58.3 (56.3)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per pupil	413.7 (415.0)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 115 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

7. Standards seen during the inspection were well above average. They were very high in the A-level physical education course and well above average in English, French, biology, chemistry, geography and history. Standards were above average in psychology, where there is a much wider range of prior attainment than in other subjects.
8. Achievement is very good in the sixth form for almost all students in response to very good teaching and support from staff. Students make very good gains in their learning as they take up new subjects or respond to the demands of more challenging A-level courses. Of the subjects inspected in detail, achievement is very good in English, French, mathematics, history and physical education. Achievement is good in biology, chemistry, psychology and geography.
9. The standards of English and literacy skills in the sixth form are well above average and this enables students to make very good progress in their chosen courses. Speaking and listening are very impressive because there are many opportunities in all lessons for students to use talk to explain, explore and evaluate, and to debate, justify and challenge a wide range concepts, theories and opinions. Students' standards in mathematics are overall well above average and other departments support a range of numerical experiences. For example, in chemistry students can calculate the pH values of solutions and understand the approximations made in the mathematical methods employed. In psychology students make good use of statistics when interrogating collected data. Students make good use of the ICT facilities within departments and have access to the ICT suites at lunchtime. This compensates for the paucity of ICT resources in the library. The standard of students' ICT skills is above average, particularly in research, word processing and desk-top-publishing tasks.

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

Attitudes to learning and to school life are very good. The personal development of pupils is excellent; spiritual and cultural developments are very good, moral and social developments are excellent. Attendance is very good in the main school and in the sixth form. Punctuality across the whole school is very good. Pupils behave very well and develop very good relationships within the school. These aspects continue to be a strong feature of the school and reaffirm the findings of the last inspection report.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils have very good behaviour and attitudes to learning and this has a positive impact on their achievement.
- Relationships are very good at all levels and contribute to an ethos of support and respect within the school.
- Attendance and punctuality are very good and contribute to very good learning.
- Very good opportunities are provided to help pupils build confidence, raise their self-esteem and develop a sense of personal responsibility.

### **Commentary**

- Attendance is very good across all year groups and has maintained a trend of improvement. Punctuality in school is very good and reflects an area of improvement since the last inspection. Unauthorised absence is at a low level and mainly associated with family holidays taken during term time.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	3.8	School data:	0.6
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.*

- Pupils enjoy coming to school and the great majority display very good attitudes to their learning. There is a strong work ethic in the school. Pupils listen well, demonstrate high levels of commitment to their work and show themselves to be well motivated and keen to learn.
- The great majority of pupils display very good standards of behaviour in and around the school, which serves to enhance the very good, sometimes excellent, relationships that exist between pupils and between pupils and adults. The consistently very good behaviour to be seen in the school is very much a product of very good teaching and an extremely formal and disciplined ethos for learning. In the great majority of lessons observed pupils were seen to co-operate well with each other, share ideas in a positive way and to celebrate the achievements of their peers. In a few lessons observed the silly actions of a few less self-disciplined pupils were ignored by the other pupils which, when coupled with effective teaching strategies, ensured that progress in learning was maintained.

#### **Ethnic background of pupils**

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

#### **Exclusions in the last school year**

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
994	29	0
6	0	0
14	0	0
3	0	0
2	0	0
15	0	0
14	0	0
39	0	0

Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British - any other Asian background	10	0	0
Black or Black British - African	6	0	0
Black or Black British - any other Black background	4	0	0
Chinese	11	0	0
Information not obtained.	20	0	0

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

13. Pupils display a very good level of commitment to the school ethos of mutual support and respect for others. This is well evidenced by the very low level of exclusions for misbehaviour. Bullying is not an issue in the school. The school has a zero tolerance policy towards bullying and racial harassment and pupils and parents agree that the school deals effectively with any incidents that occur. The inspection team was particularly careful in investigating the concerns raised in the pupils' questionnaire about poor behaviour in school. However, following checks of records and many observations and discussions with pupils, staff and parents, the inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns.
14. The school is a very orderly community. This is well demonstrated at those few corridor and entrance crossover points that become congested during lesson break times. The positive relationships and patience shown by pupils ensure their orderly movement. During the inspection pupils were often seen offering to help others, holding open doors and regularly saying "please" and "thank you" in a natural way.
15. The school provides a very good range of personal development opportunities for pupils. Of significant note are the house activities and the wide and extensive range of extra-curricular activities. These are eagerly taken up by pupils and provide significant benefits in helping to develop and enhance their life skills. In particular, the very high numbers of lower school pupils achieving the RSA public speaking award serves to demonstrate well the mature and positive approach pupils take to developing their own personal skills. A good number of pupils have taken advantage of the recently introduced pupil suggestion scheme to put forward their ideas for improving aspects of their time in school, with many related to extending further their access to personal skills development. Responsibilities offered to pupils are willingly accepted and undertaken with vigour and obvious pride.
16. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent overall. The pupils' spiritual development is very good. They have very good opportunities to take part and consider the spiritual dimension of life in a range of subjects, such as English, history and personal and social education. In their study of the environment in geography for example, they are given very good opportunities to understand spiritual questions as they relate to the wider world. Through their work in religious education, pupils rapidly become more self-aware as they relate their knowledge of world religions to their spiritual lives. They recognise the universality and validity of a wide range of religious experiences, and realise that these are highly influential in shaping lifestyles and relationships. This helps them to respect others' beliefs. The school gives a high priority to whole school assemblies in promoting spiritual and moral values. Assemblies overall make a very good contribution to spiritual development and provide opportunities for pupils to observe, reflect and ponder on values and beliefs. Pupils have opportunities to attend assemblies only four days a week, which means that statutory requirements in this area are still not fully met.



17. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the principles of right and wrong and have no hesitation in expressing their views on ethical issues and personal values in lessons or informal, well-reasoned debate. Lessons frequently contain excellent opportunities for moral debate, such as on the ethical implications of ownership and control of the Antarctic and the role of trans-national companies in the international provision of labour. Teachers and adults act as very good role models of correct behaviour. Pupils are left in no doubt as how to conduct themselves.
18. Pupils understand and fulfil the responsibilities of living in a community very well. All are similarly intellectual and ambitious and they stimulate each other in conversation. They co-operate well in joint activities. They draw on the wider community for their voluntary and charitable activities. There are many visits to the community and visitors to the school that require pupils to adjust to a range of social situations. Opportunities for engaging in community life are very strong, whether in tutor time, in lessons, or in teams and clubs. Although pupils go through a democratic process of voting for the school council, some pupils currently see the resulting body as ineffective. A weakness in community learning is the fact that there is no open access to ICT rooms.
19. The social development of pupils is excellent and encouraged by the very high levels of participation in an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities and ambitious trips abroad to promote further study. These enable pupils to develop self-confidence and the ability to get on well in other cultures. Students learn the skills of active co-operation in the school council and in the planned development of oral collaboration in a wide range of subjects. Planning, rehearsal and presentation of dramatic productions and debates enhance their social competence in a range of situations. Collaboration on the sports field and in musical ensembles is a strong feature of provision.
20. The pupils' cultural development is very good. Pupils experience a wide range of literature, art and music from European and world cultures. In religious education, pupils have very good opportunities to study world religions and the cultures associated with them. There are outstanding opportunities for pupils to attend concerts and art galleries as part of extra-curricular provision. A strong programme of international visitors speaking to classes and assemblies gives pupils additional insights into other cultures. Excellent opportunities for travel are an outstanding feature of provision for the development of multicultural understanding. Pupils have a very good knowledge of local cultures and other cultures round the world. They are sometimes less understanding of the wealth of multicultural variety within Britain and lessons in personal and social education now include issues around asylum seekers and refugees.

## **Sixth form**

21. Student attendance is very good and there is very good practice in the monitoring and follow-up of all incidents of unexplained absence in the sixth form. Observations during the inspection showed punctuality to lessons to be very good.
22. Behaviour in the sixth form is very good. Students were seen to conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner and presented as very good role models to the rest of the school. Students are enthusiastic about their studies, consider they receive a high quality of teaching and acknowledge the academic benefits of being in the sixth form. Students enjoy, and undertake in a mature and responsible manner, the many whole school roles and personal development opportunities offered by the school.

Students displayed very positive attitudes to their learning and to the sixth form. One in four students completing the questionnaire considered there were elements of bullying and racial tension in the sixth form. Inspectors took the time to examine this view and, while not doubting these concerns, could not find any current evidence to support it.

23. Most students considered they are well advised and made an active choice to come into the sixth form. Students willingly volunteer for a wide range of opportunities to work with, and support the learning of, younger pupils. Many are involved as peer mentors, subject prefects and form leaders and provide invaluable support to younger pupils, helping them develop learning skills and raising their understanding and awareness levels in various aspects of their work and time in school. These wide-ranging responsibility opportunities provide both the students and younger pupils with quality learning and personal development experiences.
24. In discussion students talked in a mature way about their plans when they leave school, and are clearly thinking sensibly about their futures. Most are polite and friendly; they engage readily in conversation with visitors and willingly make positive contributions to lesson debates.
25. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good because provision is planned carefully in the curriculum and in the ethos of the sixth form, as in the main school. Students show themselves as having acquired a coherent set of personal beliefs, which is evident in their contributions to lessons, assemblies and formal debate.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The overall quality of education is very good. Very effective teaching enables pupils to achieve very well. The school provides education of equal quality to all of its pupils and the curriculum provides well for pupils preparing for higher education. There is very good advice and guidance for pupils. Links with parents are very good and partnerships with the community and other schools are satisfactory and improving.

### **Teaching and learning**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subjects and lessons are well prepared.
- Very good teaching was seen in all years and all subjects.
- Assessment practice is very good in the sixth form; regular monitoring and review have a very positive impact on standards.
- Greater consistency is needed in following the school policy to promote active learning.

### **Commentary**

#### ***Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 143 lessons***

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
12 (8%)	60 (42%)	55 (38%)	14 (10%)	1 (0.7%)	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. Teaching was not judged in those lessons taught by members of the adjoining girls' school so totals do not equal 100 per cent.*

26. Teaching is very good, as seen in lessons during the inspection, in the pupils' work and in the results of tests and examinations. Some very good or excellent teaching was seen in all year groups and across all subjects reported on in detail. This reflects the strength of teaching across the school and is a key factor in very good learning and achievement. Parents, pupils and students all emphasised the very good quality of teaching in questionnaire returns.
27. Excellent teaching was seen in such widely differing subjects as English, geography, history, religious education, music and physical education. Teaching was very good overall in French, mathematics, religious education, geography, history, design and technology, music, physical education and citizenship. Teaching was good in all other subjects, including science, despite the considerable upheaval caused by recent staffing changes in this department.
28. In the best lessons there was a good balance between support and challenge. Teachers know their subject very well and they can describe and explain issues using a variety of examples. Many teachers started the lesson with short starter activities, designed to get pupils thinking and focused on the subject. These activities, combined with a clear explanation of the objectives of the lesson, provided a very good framework for learning. In lessons that spanned seventy minutes, very good teaching provided a range of well-timed activities so that pupils maintained concentration and developed a good work rate.
29. The difference between good and very good teaching was the amount of engagement of pupils with their learning; when teaching was very good, planned activities provided intellectual challenge, stimulation and opportunities to develop thinking skills. For example, a very active learning session in music involved pupils changing position around the room to sing antiphonally, with other members of the group taking it in turns to conduct. In physical education a Year 11 group achieved very high standards because of the teacher's excellent technical input combined with the use of ICT to help them analyse movements. In geography, a Year 10 group tackled a case study on the Philippines and were challenged by a range of diagrams, maps and photographs designed to support investigation and deduction; the teacher demanded high levels of thought and attention and probing questions ensured that they drew on their previous knowledge in their conclusions.
30. Very good teaching leads to very good learning in all years. All lessons start promptly and have a disciplined learning environment. Staff are rigorous in ensuring that pupils act with courtesy and respect at all times. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers and to each other. Pair and group work takes place with mutual respect and consideration.
31. Occasionally teaching is less effective when there is too much teacher talk and few opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and explore issues or concepts. In a few lessons, teachers did not check understanding before moving on to the next topic, so pupils were not secure in their knowledge. Teachers do not make the best use of time when lessons are almost entirely taken up by pupils tackling questions from textbooks.

32. The teaching of literacy is good overall. There is very good practice in several departments. Inspectors saw the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy in many lessons. The understanding and use of specialist vocabulary in each subject are very well taught. Teachers ensure that lesson objectives are clearly stated so that pupils know what they have to do. However, opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning, both during and, particularly, at the end of lessons, are not always taken, or too little time is given to them. Most teachers teach basic note taking and essay planning, and pupils are encouraged to respond creatively through, for example, stories, letters, presentations or diaries. In some subjects, such as religious education, teachers provide high quality writing prompts and guidance sheets to help pupils to extend their answers and to structure their writing effectively. Inconsistencies of practice between departments prevent all teaching from being very good: for example, evaluation, debating and group discussion skills are regularly promoted in physical education, design technology and history, but there are fewer opportunities in art, science and geography.
33. Numeracy is taught very well in mathematics and other departments; notably science, geography, history, physical education and design and technology support a broad range of numerical experiences, for example in science pupils in Year 9 are required to calculate the refractive index of a variety of materials from experimental data. However, there is no systematic planning across the curriculum to build on pupils' skills and make teaching more effective. Teachers make satisfactory use of ICT overall in teaching and learning. ICT skills are taught well when there is sufficient access but they are not used enough in mathematics, geography, design and technology and art.
34. Teaching meets the different learning needs of pupils very well, in the context of a selective school, where all pupils have at least above average standards. Teachers know and address pupils' special educational needs well because good individual education plans make needs, targets and strategies clear. Teachers provide good guidance and support for the small numbers of pupils with English as an additional language and their needs are identified in lesson plans. Gifted and talented pupils are recognised and teachers ensure that they are sufficiently challenged in their work.
35. Assessment overall is good. Much effort has been put into the development of assessment and staff, pupils and parents see it as being very important in raising achievement. The whole school policy of assessment for learning and comment marking gives clear expectations and good guidance. Assessment is excellent in geography, with peer and self-evaluation being particular features, and is a strength in many other subjects. Departments collect a great deal of assessment data about pupils and use this effectively for planning, to let pupils know how well they are doing and to set challenging targets. Whole school assessment data, however, is not centrally stored to allow individuals and groups to be tracked quickly.
36. Marking of pupils' work is good; teachers use constructive comments to explain how work can be improved. Pupils' opportunities to assess their own and each other's work are very good in some subjects, particularly physical education, geography and history, but more limited in others; this is an area that the school has targeted for further development. Assessment of pupils with special educational needs is built into the schools' routines and ensures that pupils' changing requirements are addressed and those who no longer require special provision are removed from the register of special educational needs.

## **Sixth form**

37. Teaching and learning are very good in the sixth form and are key features in how well students achieve and the high standards they reach in examinations. In the subjects inspected in detail, teaching and learning were very good in English, French, mathematics, geography, history and physical education; teaching and learning were good in chemistry, biology and psychology. Very good teaching was also seen in many of the lessons that were sampled in other subjects.
38. Key features of very good teaching were seen, for example in a history lesson where students were required to formulate hypotheses to account for the Nazi gains in the 1930 election. Whenever a student had developed one (for example, the industrial working classes voted for Nazis) the teacher used his computer to produce maps and data which disproved/provided evidence for the contention. They then moved on to another hypothesis, which was addressed in the same way. In this way, through skilful questioning and the clever use of ICT to check historical evidence, students made very good progress with regard to historical skills.
39. Assessment in the sixth form, overall, is very good. Assessment is excellent in geography and very strong in English, mathematics, French, history, physical education and music. Numerical data and other information are very effectively used to inform students of their progress and how they can achieve more. The programme of monitoring, assessment and review is very thorough and has a positive effect on standards. Targets are regularly set and very closely monitored against previous attainment, except in the sciences, where there is some inconsistent practice in the use of criteria to set targets. Marking of work is very good, using constructive comments and often well explained examples to show students how work can be improved.

## **The curriculum**

Curriculum provision is good in the main school and in the sixth form; it is well suited to pupils of high academic ability and prepares them very well for higher education. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities are outstanding. Accommodation and resources for learning are good.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The excellent range and quality of enrichment and extra-curricular activities make a significant contribution to the personal development of pupils and students.
- The sixth form curriculum meets the career aspirations of the students.
- Provision for work-related education is not yet fully in place.

## **Commentary**

40. The curriculum for pupils in Year 7 to Year 9 is broad and balanced, and covers all the National Curriculum requirements. Nearly all pupils study both French and German from Year 8. In Years 10 and 11 pupils follow a core programme of English, mathematics and science, personal and social education, religious education, ICT and physical education plus a number of additional courses dependent on their interests and aptitudes. There is an option to take business studies, and most pupils continue with two modern languages. The programme at this stage is flexible to suit the needs

of pupils who wish to take particular combinations of subjects. GCSE entries vary between nine and eleven subjects, including some short courses. There are alternative tutorial or core subject lessons for pupils who need extra support.

41. The curriculum across all years is particularly strong in mathematics, religious education, citizenship, history, geography and physical education. There is good provision in modern foreign languages, science and art. Citizenship and history are particularly innovative in their approach. The content of the ICT course in Years 7 to 9 has been much improved by the recent increase in teaching time. There has been some progress in introducing vocational elements into the curriculum, such as the Year 9 Industrial Experience Project and some extra study in Year 10 focussing on independent learning skills, but provision does not yet meet all the statutory requirements for work-related learning. The 2004–2006 curriculum development plans seek to tackle the lack of specific vocational skills training and experience.
42. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. When necessary, pupils are supported in classes by teaching assistants or teachers. Pupils not taking a second modern foreign language are tutored in English by a learning support assistant and achieve well. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is very good. In Years 10 and 11 they have the opportunity to develop their particular strengths, for example three separate sciences or two languages, while maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum.
43. Provision for learning outside the school day is outstanding. The school provides a very wide variety of clubs and house activities and learning is enriched in many areas. The debating society is meeting with increasing success in national competitions and regular craft days are held on Saturdays to help learning in design and technology. Learning experiences are widened by guest speakers and the many visits and trips abroad for both educational and holiday experiences. The school has the Sportsmark silver award, which reflects the very wide range of sports that are offered and the high participation rates of the pupils. There is a comprehensive school match programme and a high proportion of pupils are successful at county, regional, and sometimes national levels. The arts also make a significant contribution with many opportunities to improve skills and to develop self-confidence. There are regular school shows featuring music and drama and the music department makes an excellent contribution with a wide range of clubs in a variety of styles. The summer jazz barbecue evening and the regular lunchtime recitals are especially well attended. Many pupils take part in local, county and national musical ensembles.

## **Sixth form**

44. In the sixth form students can choose from a widening range of AS and A-level courses. The subjects on offer are well matched to their career aspirations and build well on their previous experiences. Collaboration with neighbouring schools is growing and already there is shared provision in some subjects, notably religious education and design and technology. Psychology has grown in popularity and is a good example of open access to learning for every student. All students are entered for general studies at A-level, a programme that includes extra key skills and a challenging strand of religious education.

## **Staffing, accommodation and resources**

45. Overall, the school is well staffed; the match of teachers to the curriculum is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. There are many well-qualified and experienced staff. There are, however, two areas where the school acknowledges the need to make improvements. Recent resignations in the science department have

necessitated significant re-organisation of timetables. As a result some pupils have experienced several changes of teacher in recent months and this has affected the overall quality of teaching. In ICT some of the teaching by non-specialists is not of the same quality as that provided by the two specialist teachers. There is an adequate match of support staff to the curriculum. Where support is available, experienced staff carry out their roles effectively. However, no support is available in food technology and this is leading to teaching staff being over-burdened with practical preparation.

46. Accommodation is good overall. Extensive alterations, upgrading and new building since the last inspection have had a beneficial impact on the ethos of the school and on standards in general. The buildings are kept in good order and provide for a pleasant learning environment. Issues raised in the last inspection have been addressed and there is an asset register identifying a comprehensive programme for further improvement. Most departments are fully suited, which provides at least satisfactory facilities for teaching. Accommodation for special educational needs is modest but provides a satisfactory administrative base.
47. Immediate concerns include congestion in corridors and stairways, in particular access to the library, mathematics and ICT rooms. Not all parts of the school are fully accessible to wheelchairs. Some rooms are small, which limits the range of teaching methodologies, while others are in need of refurbishment and redecoration. The school has conducted health and safety checks but inspectors identified a small number of items requiring urgent attention.
48. The sixth form is taught in the same accommodation as the main school and provision is therefore also good overall. Most lessons are taught within subject areas, but in music, Year 12 students are taught in non-specialist accommodation for almost a third of their timetable and in biology, there is a shortage of practical work because some lessons are taught out of laboratories. The students are provided with a social area, which is in urgent need of refurbishment and redecoration and does not reflect the good order and pleasant environment that exists elsewhere. The library is designated as an area for independent learning for students in Year 12 but this is not conducive to private study given the large numbers of students and the limited research facilities available. The lack of designated teaching areas for the sixth form contributes to the perception of some students that they are not treated as young adults.
49. Resources for learning are good. The school has recently given priority to developing ICT resources. A large investment in the music department, for example, has provided fifteen electronic keyboards connected to computers to help pupils improve their compositional skills. In physical education digital video cameras are used to analyse movements and help to improve technical skills. The ICT department has also recently been equipped with new computers and an improved network server. The ratio of pupils to computers now stands at 5:1 and is in line with government recommendations. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well with suitable resources in subjects. In mathematics, however, although resources are satisfactory overall, there is less equipment and there are fewer artefacts than in most mathematics departments. Most subjects have full sets of modern texts but the books in the library are generally out-of-date and hold little appeal for the pupils. As a consequence, the library borrowing rate is poor and well below that found in similar schools.

## **Care, guidance and support**

The school makes very good provision to ensure the pupil's care and welfare during their time in school. It provides them with good support and guidance. The school makes good provision to involve pupils and respond to their views. Provision to listen and respond to the views of the sixth form is satisfactory. These aspects of the school have improved since the last inspection.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Excellent induction systems enable a smooth transition of pupils into school.
- High quality child protection and related procedures ensure pupils' best interests.



- There are good opportunities for pupils to comment on aspects of the school.
- Pupils and students have limited access to external careers guidance; students would like more pastoral support.

## **Commentary**

50. Excellent induction procedures ensure new pupils and their parents are quickly and effectively introduced to the routines of school life. School staff meet pupils in their primary schools and close liaison with pupils and their parents underpins preparation for the new academic year. An excellent practice is an off-site activity day for all Year 7 pupils, which helps pupils and staff get to know each other. There is an excellent range of information packs and parent and pupil briefings. The close collaborative working between pupils in Year 7 and their sixth form student mentors has a significant impact on how well the younger pupils settle into the routines of school life.
51. Very good child protection and care procedures are in place and this represents an area of significant improvement since the last inspection. Teachers receive regular updates in child protection and are aware of, and familiar with, the need for vigilance in monitoring the well-being and welfare of the pupils in their care. There are good procedures to ensure that pupils work in a healthy and safe environment. Risk assessment techniques are well established and embedded into school routines. Provision would benefit from including more formal systems for staff and governors to be involved in auditing and reporting on health and safety matters.
52. All pupils enjoy coming to school and value highly the advice and guidance they receive from staff about their work. However, the school timetables have little planned time built into them for pastoral support and a high proportion of pupils do not feel there is someone they could approach with a personal problem, according to the pupil questionnaire returns. The effective use of systematic assessment procedures enables targets to be agreed with pupils, shared with parents and regularly monitored to show progress being achieved. There is limited access to careers education guidance in Years 10 and 11 with only a one-lesson contact with an external adviser organised by the school. Pupils may request an individual interview, unlike most other schools where all pupils in Year 11 routinely have at least one personal interview to discuss the full range of career options.
53. Good and developing systems are in place to canvas pupil views about aspects of the school. The recently introduced school council is beginning to make a positive contribution towards improving the learning environment and to provide quality feedback on the day-to-day experiences of pupils in school. There are open meetings where pupils air their views on given topics. The school council noticeboard gives full details of current projects and concerns, so that all pupils are aware of what is being considered.

## **Sixth form**

54. Students value the good quality of support and guidance available to them about their work. However, there are few opportunities for student and staff meetings to discuss any pastoral concerns or to seek advice. The school self-evaluation report identifies this as an area for improvement. Subject teachers are generous with their time in supporting learning. Subject retention rates are very high and students expressed great satisfaction with the high quality of teaching they receive. They readily support and contribute to the sixth form council, although a number of students consider the council lacks recognition and influence as an agent for change in the running of the school. A high proportion of students felt that they were not given a discrete identity as young adults, for example in separate sixth form teaching areas.

55. There is very good practice for self-assessment amongst the sixth form students, with targets being agreed and reviewed with their tutors on a regular basis. A number would like more access to personal career guidance to better inform their future employment decision making, particularly those not going on to higher education studies. The inspection team agrees that informed career and vocational guidance to sixth form students is limited.

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

Parents are very supportive and involved in the education process. Parents are provided with a very good level of information. These very good aspects of the school have been maintained since the last inspection. Links with the community and with other schools and colleges are satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are very supportive, closely involved in their children's learning and have confidence in the work of the school.
- The school provides a very good level of information to parents about progress and achievements.
- Links with the community and other schools and colleges have yet to impact greatly on improving the quality of learning experiences offered to pupils.

### **Commentary**

56. The school is very popular amongst parents from both within, and beyond, the normal expected catchment area. The school continues to be over-subscribed, with some three applicants for every place offered. This reflects the high level of satisfaction expressed by parents in a recent questionnaire. Most parents consider staff very approachable and always responsive to their approaches. All parents are pleased with the academic achievements and value greatly the school's high expectations for behaviour. Discussions with staff and with pupils show there are very good arrangements for the involvement of parents in the regular reviews of progress. In particular, parents praised the emphasis given to supporting the development of less able and underachieving pupils. Plans are in place to survey parent views on an annual basis as a means of ensuring greater parent involvement in the future development of the school.
57. Information provided to parents is very good. Many parents value highly the day planner system as a good means of monitoring how their child is progressing at school. Evidence from discussions with staff and parents show that many are well used, by both teachers and parents alike, for the exchange of information and to raise any concerns and queries. The good practice for organised meetings between parents and teachers and the system of interim summary reports ensure parents can regularly monitor the progress being made by their children. End-of-year progress reports provide very good levels of information on what pupils have achieved and outline areas for improvement. However, with the exception of Year 9, no indication is provided to show standards relative to National Curriculum expectations.
58. During the inspection many examples were provided of teachers and parents working together in a collaborative manner to help improve learning. Most parents are very happy with the way the school is run. However, a few parents expressed concerns over the way careers guidance and work experience placements are organised. The inspection team agree that pupils receive

limited access to external careers guidance during their time in school. A few other parents were concerned about inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Inspectors found that teaching overall was very good but occasionally lessons were less successful when teachers did not engage pupils actively in the learning process.

59. The school benefits greatly from an active parent and teachers association. This dedicated group of parents organises regular fundraising social events that are well attended by parents and provide valued opportunities for parents to meet with staff in an informal setting. The learning environment has been greatly enhanced by the many donations received from the parent and teachers association.
60. The school is not seen as a community resource, with very little use being made of the school premises, sports centre and grounds for the benefit of the local community. Links with other schools are restricted to a number of joint activities with the adjoining school for girls, including a shared dining building and music provision, and a joint orchestra. The school has recognised the need to develop further its links with other schools and the community and a number of initiatives are planned to enable closer collaboration and partnership working in this important area.

### **Sixth form**

61. Links with parents are very good, as in the main school. Parents of students in the sixth form are very supportive of the school. Links with the community and other schools and colleges are satisfactory. Links with other schools are restricted to a number of joint activities with the adjoining girls school, the orchestra being the most significant, and shared teaching of some A-level subjects. There are good links with providers of higher education and very good mechanisms to support students in their transfer to the next stage of their education.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The overall quality of leadership and management is very good. The leadership of the headteacher and other key staff is very good and management is good. Governance is very good; the governing body has many strengths and an outstanding commitment to the development of the school but it has not ensured that all statutory requirements are met in full. Provision for collective worship does not meet legal requirements, but this is not affecting pupils' personal development, which is very good. Provision for work-related learning is limited and does not yet meet requirements in Years 10 and 11 but the school development plan identifies improvements to be made in the coming year.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good leadership leads to very good achievement, a very good ethos and racial harmony.
- All staff and pupils are committed to raising achievement.
- Very good financial management supports learning.
- Systems for evaluating the progress of pupils and students do not make best use of available subject specific benchmarks.

### **Commentary**

62. The very good leadership and commitment of the headteacher contribute to the school's continued success and constant drive for higher standards. Under his strong guidance, the school seeks to achieve a high quality of performance in all aspects of its work. Senior managers support the headteacher very well and together they form a very effective management group.
63. The quality of strategic school planning is excellent. The leadership of subjects is very good overall. Departmental development plans link suitably to the school's improvement plan, which draws well on information from the school's self-evaluation and provides a lucid and appropriate set of priorities and targets for improvement. Heads of Year provide good support to form tutors and monitor pupils' personal development and behaviour.
64. The governing body is appropriately constituted, meets regularly and considers the full range of its responsibilities. Governors are well informed and they contribute very effectively to the school development plan and ongoing initiatives, for example the bid for specialist school status. Governors receive regular, very detailed reports from the headteacher and they pay particular attention to school performance through test and examination results with a rigorous evaluation process each year. Governors value highly the work of the headteacher and staff at the school. However, they are quite prepared to challenge vigorously the headteacher's views and to call him and senior staff to account. They set appropriately challenging targets for the school's performance. Governors are justifiably proud of the school's many and considerable strengths and are aware of what needs to be improved.
65. Governors have approved a wide range of policies, including those promoting racial equality and ensuring access for all. Governors have ensured that the school fulfils most of its statutory responsibilities, but those relating to collective worship and work-related learning are not fulfilled completely. Current accommodation does not include any space large enough to hold the entire school, but the school makes good use of the space it has. Pupils attend high quality collective worship opportunities on only four days each week, but this omission is not having an impact on pupils' personal development, which is very good. The statutory requirement to provide work-related learning for all pupils in Years 10 and 11 took effect in September 2004 but the school has not yet implemented all the requirements fully. However, improvements in provision are detailed in the school development plan so that statutory requirements will be met by the next academic year.
66. The management of special educational needs and very good leadership ensure very good identification and provision for pupils. Governors monitor special educational needs provision through their annual report to parents. A governor has special responsibility for special educational needs. Funding for special educational needs is managed well. Parents are well informed about provision and parents and boys take a full part in annual reviews of special educational needs. All statutory requirements in this area are fully met.
67. Procedures to monitor performance are satisfactory. The school analyses data from examinations and tests carefully and uses its own systems to assess and predict achievement. The outcomes of these procedures are very good, as seen in the very good performances in external examinations. However, the school systems tend to emphasise the importance of rank ordering between departments, which, whilst providing an overview of change over time is less effective in providing a benchmark against national performance for each subject. The maintenance of the high proportion

of GCSE grades A\* and A is partly a result of the school's procedures for managing the coursework required as part of examinations.

68. There is a robust system of performance management that ensures high levels of accountability in terms of examination results and managerial responsibilities. The inclusion of targets for pupils with special educational needs is a positive feature of the system and its impact is reflected in success in public examinations. Development of a wider range of teaching styles has been less effective and this is reflected in a significant proportion of lessons seen that had little active engagement of pupils in their learning.
69. There is good provision for the induction and training of staff. The comprehensive induction programme helps new teachers to integrate quickly and to play a full role in the work of the school. Good use is made of courses run by examination boards and information from these is discussed at team meetings. The school relies heavily on its own internal resources for other aspects of staff development. Whilst there is much good practice that can be built on, the school is at present not making best use of wider collaborative approaches.
70. With the help of a most capable and experienced bursar, the school's financial management and planning are very good. The latest available audit of the school's finances indicates that the financial systems operate extremely well. Appropriate checks and comparisons take place to ensure that the school spends its money carefully and gets good value. It uses specific funds coming into the school, such as those for building programmes and standards funds, properly for their designated purposes. Governors have ensured that there are strong financial controls and have enabled several building projects in recent years. Capital development funds are substantial but earmarked for improving accommodation and supporting the proposed specialist school status.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,872,520	Balance from previous year	504,232
Total expenditure	3,809,774	Balance carried forward to the next	566,978
Expenditure per pupil	62,746		

71. The main aids to boys' achievement are: very high expectations; very good teaching; above average basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT; boys' very good behaviour and attitudes to work; very effective leadership and management; and an outstanding and wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities. The main barriers to raising achievement are: a few difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified teachers in subjects such as science and some deficiencies in accommodation, particularly for the sixth form.
72. The school has sustained and built upon the strengths identified in its previous inspection report in 1999 and has made good progress since then. Standards in external examinations remain very high at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. There has been good improvement in respect of provision for pupils with special educational needs, assessment and staff development.
73. Taking into account the funding received by the school, the social and economic backgrounds of boys and the current quality of education and achievement, the school provides very good value for money.

**Sixth form**

74. Very good leadership and management in the sixth form are setting a clear direction for further improvement. The newly appointed head of sixth form is developing very effective systems to coordinate the work of subject and form tutors. His thorough but sensitive approach ensures that students of all ethnic backgrounds and different capabilities receive very good advice, support and guidance that help them to seek high standards in academic work. The head of sixth form is aware of the need to do more to develop mechanisms to help students' all-round development. Sixth form students are very good role models for younger boys. The very good ethos and racial harmony in the school are very evident in the sixth form and are characterised by mutual support and self-respect.
75. Very good and increasingly effective systems to track students' academic development help to raise standards. Students usually find that the courses available suit their aspirations and career interests. In Years 12 and 13, the thorough analysis and feedback to students about their progress and how to improve ensure that they know how close they are to reaching their full potential. Consequently, almost all students complete their chosen course of study. Most students are preparing for application to higher education but more attention to careers education would benefit a minority of less academic students.
76. Governors are keen to develop the sixth form. They keep very well informed about all aspects of the work of the sixth form including standards, staffing and the curriculum.

The school meets statutory requirements for sixth form provision. The sixth form is very cost-effective in relation to the school's expenditure as a whole.

77. The main aids to raising achievement are: very good teaching; high retention of students; very good enrichment through extra-curricular activities; and the very positive attitudes that students bring to their work. The major barriers to higher achievement are linked to: an absence of opportunities for students to develop a more defined and appropriate sixth form identity through the provision of designated facilities; and more comprehensive pastoral arrangements to support their personal development.

## **WORK-RELATED LEARNING (WRL)**

Provision for work-related learning is unsatisfactory. It does not meet statutory requirements.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Specially planned industry days are currently the main provision for all pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Work experience and work shadowing have extended optional experience for some.
- The school has not audited work-related aspects of provision in the curriculum.
- Assessment and reporting arrangements are not in place.

### **Commentary**

78. Standards of the knowledge and understanding of pupils in work-related issues are not assessed. There is no managed programme of teaching about work-related issues. Curriculum coverage that may exist in subjects across the school has not been identified and its delivery is not monitored. Some parents and some pupils, when interviewed, criticised the paucity of provision and their remarks are endorsed by inspection findings. Current provision does not meet statutory requirements in ensuring that all pupils in Years 10 and 11 have opportunities to learn about work, to learn from work-place experiences and to develop and use the range of inter-personal skills needed in the work environment.
79. A co-ordinator for WRL appointed this academic year has planned extended provision by special study days for both Year 10 and Year 11. One such day has so far been delivered this school year with another scheduled for next month. The programme and evaluations of the event so far completed indicate high quality.
80. Work experience and work shadowing opportunities have up to now been optional and available only to pupils in Year 11 after completion of their GCSE examinations. Planning is well advanced, however, to make work experience a requirement for all Year 11 pupils in 2005. Parents of pupils in Years 10 and 11 have been very supportive in identifying new work placements. Vetting of these new placements has been arranged with a reputable educational trust.
81. There is a careers library on site and biennial careers fairs afford the opportunity for pupils and students to gain information about professional career paths. For those pupils who wish it, the Connexions service provides individual interviews and careers advice. Careers education is not included in the curriculum as a discrete programme.
82. Development planning does outline intentions that could meet current requirements for WRL by 2006. Attendance at WRL study days cannot alone offer the full range of experiences needed. The school needs to identify contributions to WRL from other curriculum areas; enable and follow up work experience for all pupils in Years 10 and 11; implement a planned

programme of careers education; and ensure that achievements in WRL are reported to parents.

83. Work-related learning was not a statutory requirement at the time of the last inspection.



## 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 and French were inspected in detail and German was sampled.*

84. Results in GCSE examinations in **German** in both 2003 and 2004 were very high in comparison to national averages. In 2004, three quarters of pupils gained A\* or A grades and they also did relatively better in German than in other subjects. During the inspection a sample of written work was examined and three lessons were observed. Standards are well above average and pupils are achieving very well considering their attainment on entry to the course in Year 8. The overall quality of teaching and learning seen was very good. Time was well used and pupils were actively engaged in learning through a variety of activities.

Provision in English is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Recent Year 9 national test results are below those of similar selective schools.
- Writing is a weaker aspect of the subject in Years 7 to 9.
- A very good range of extra-curricular activities provides considerable enrichment.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes and a high level of commitment.
- Very good leadership provides strong motivation for both teachers and pupils.
- Assessment information is not used well enough in lesson planning in Years 7 to 9.

#### Commentary

85. Standards in Year 9 national tests are consistently very high compared with national standards but are below the average attained in other selective schools. This has been the pattern over the last five years. Standards on entry to the school are consistently above average, but are noticeably lower in English than in mathematics and science. Standards at GCSE are also very high compared with all schools, in both English language and literature: however, the proportion of pupils regularly gaining the higher grades of A\* and A in English is also below that attained in selective schools nationally. Although there was an improvement in 2004, results in English remain below those in the other two core subjects.
86. The standards of work seen in Years 9 and 11 are well above the average attained in all schools nationally and very high in speaking and listening. Pupils are on course to repeat the very high standards in tests and examinations of recent years. Most pupils in all years talk very confidently about a wide range of topical issues as well as the texts they are studying. They clearly explain and justify their opinions, but are also prepared to modify them as a result of group or class discussions. Pupils have very well developed reading skills. There are many opportunities for pupils to practise their deductive and inferential skills in lessons; by Year 11 their awareness of the power of language to move and persuade is impressive. In Years 8 and 9, pupils are reading and enjoying challenging texts, such as a selection of Shakespeare's plays,

Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and the poetry of Wilfred Owen, which are normally studied for GCSE at other schools. Writing is the weakest area of English. Although overall standards of literacy are above average when pupils enter the school, many still have problems with spelling, punctuation and grammar. They also have difficulty in constructing and sustaining longer pieces of writing. However, by Year 9, pupils already have a good critical awareness and most are able to support their views with appropriate evidence and quotations where necessary. Writing to inform and explain is not as strong as creative and narrative writing, especially in Years 7 to 9. The department is now targeting these skills, and encouraging pupils to use their very good computer abilities to research and produce a range of booklets, leaflets and newspaper articles.

87. Pupils of all abilities and ethnic backgrounds achieve well in all years. Their achievement is aided considerably by their very positive attitudes and enthusiasm, as well as the motivation provided by their teachers. A growing range of ICT activities motivates pupils well and is helping them to become effective independent learners. All pupils take both English language and English literature at GCSE, courses which include the study of media and multicultural literature. This ensures that the subject makes a substantial contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils. Considerable enrichment is provided by such activities as regular theatre trips, visiting writers, book fairs and poetry, writing, debating and public speaking competitions as well as reading and drama clubs and regular school productions. There are also additional classes to support those pupils who are underperforming as well as those who require additional challenges.
88. Teaching and learning are good in all years: they are very good in many lessons. This is because teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of how pupils will behave and work, and they use a wide range of teaching methods to challenge and guide them. Teaching is lively and stimulating and encourages pupils to make their own decisions, to be inquisitive and to be independent. Although the department does not yet make regular use of national test level information when planning lessons or marking in Years 7 to 9, teachers are beginning to pay much greater attention to the skills which are to be developed in lessons, rather than to their content. This is helping pupils to improve their comprehension and appreciation of texts and their ability to analyse and comment upon them, as well as the structure and technical accuracy of their writing. Marking in Years 10 and 11 is very good and clearly shows pupils exactly what they must do to improve, and there is a good emphasis on self-evaluation in all years.
89. The leadership of the department is very good. The head of department sets a fine example to this relatively new English team. There is ambition, commitment and vision, and a shared love of the subject from the newest to the longest serving teacher. Management is good. All are working very hard to raise standards further, particularly in Year 9 national tests, and to ensure that each pupil achieves his maximum potential. With this aim, several initiatives have been introduced recently, but it is too soon to see any impact on pupil performance in tests. Responsibilities are appropriately delegated, new staff well supported, teaching and marking regularly monitored and needs and priorities carefully identified. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Very high standards and good achievement in Year 9 tests and at GCSE have been maintained. Teaching continues to be good, a wider range of teaching methods is helping all pupils to become more effective learners and the monitoring of teaching and marking is now embedded in departmental practice.

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

90. Provision for the development of English language and literacy skills across the curriculum is good. Standards are well above average in Years 9 and 11. Speaking and listening skills are very high. Pupils are mature and articulate and they work very well together, using talk to solve problems, to evaluate, to debate and make decisions and to share, develop and refine their ideas. Reading comprehension is also of a high standard because teachers stress the importance of these skills as well as reading for information. Standards of writing are well above average: however, there are some weaknesses in presentation and the technical accuracy of writing in all years. Pupils' literacy skills are above average when they enter the school. They achieve well in all years. Achievement is best in subjects where teachers regularly identify and address the literacy needs of all pupils, and the skills to be practised and developed, in their lesson planning.

## French

Provision in French is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good and results in GCSE examinations in French are very high.
- Pupils develop very good knowledge and understanding of French grammar.
- Assessment and marking procedures are thorough and help pupils to understand how to improve their work.
- Standards in speaking do not fully match the high standards achieved in reading and writing.

### Commentary

91. Results in GCSE examinations in 2003 and 2004 were very high in comparison to national averages, with approximately half of the pupils gaining A\* or A grades. In 2004, pupils did relatively better in French than in their other subjects. In work seen during the inspection, standards were well above average in Year 9 and Year 11 and achievement was very good.
92. Standards in Year 9 are well above average in writing. Pupils in Year 7 make rapid progress and after a few months are writing up to 80 words of accurate and informative French. By Year 9, pupils are producing impressive written work containing a range of tenses and vocabulary. The best work is already of GCSE standard. Standards in speaking, although above average, do not fully match the standards seen in writing. For example, pupils learn the vocabulary for parts of the body and can explain ailments, but do not take part in any extended speaking.
93. In Year 11, standards are already well above average in reading, listening and writing, some months before the public examinations. There are many examples of lengthy, well-constructed written work demonstrating a very good range of vocabulary and accurate use of tenses. Pupils know the rules of grammar very well. In speaking, standards have moved on significantly from Year 9, although they are still somewhat behind those in other skills. The highest attaining pupils think rapidly and can speak at some length about holidays. Others lack confidence, for example in the appropriate use of tenses. Overall, however, taking into account all four skill areas (reading, writing, speaking and listening) achievement is very good. Pupils make some use of ICT to develop their writing and their research skills, and the school is actively planning further development work here.
94. Teaching is very good and promotes very good learning. Lessons seen were well planned with clear objectives and there was good exposition of new language with good attention to developing grammatical understanding. Behaviour and attitudes were very good, levels of concentration were high and pupils made very good gains in knowledge and skills. However, teachers tended to lapse into English for significant parts of lessons and opportunities for pupils to practise the language for themselves were not consistently developed. Nevertheless, examination of exercise books shows that, over time, features such as the good use of homework, the very good marking and assessment systems and the building up of topic reference books make a significant contribution to progress.

95. The department is well led and there has been good improvement since the last inspection. There are particular strengths in the very good work done on assessment, which has had a positive impact on standards. There are very good induction arrangements for new staff. However, there is currently not enough wider developmental monitoring and evaluation outside the school's formal performance management arrangements. This is reflected in the inconsistent approach to the use of the target language by teachers and also in some inconsistency in opportunities for pupils to practise the language orally. A very good range of extra-curricular visits supports the formal curriculum.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good but opportunities to promote personal development need to be extended.
- The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are very good; they work hard and perform very well.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- ICT is underused as a resource for learning.

### **Commentary**

96. Standards in the Year 9 national tests in 2004 were very high compared with the national average and well above the average of similar schools. The proportion of pupils achieving the highest level is increasing. The results represent an improvement on the previous year and are better than results in English and science. The pupils achieve very well from their above average standards on entry to the school. Current standards of work seen in Years 7 to 9 are overall well above average; pupils are achieving very well and are on course for very high test results.
97. Standards in the GCSE mathematics examination in 2004 are very high compared to the national average with a significant proportion of pupils achieving the highest grade. Achievement from entry to the school up to GCSE is very good with the very high standards reached in Year 9 being sustained by the end of Year 11. Current standards of work seen by pupils in Years 10 and 11 are well above average and they are achieving very well. Higher attaining Year 10 pupils entered for GCSE statistics in 2004 following a one year course of study achieved a pass grade or better with a significant proportion achieving the highest grades. Current standards of work seen in Year 10 by pupils studying statistics are above average and they are achieving well.
98. The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout the main school. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, seen in their explanation and exposition. They are aware of the next steps in learning and plan lessons well. They make good use of the 'quick fire' mental starter, often linked to the main part of the lesson, and there is consistency with respect to the sharing of learning objectives. However, they do not always identify the key skills and key words to be acquired or use an end of lesson review to give some understanding of what pupils know, understand and can do. Teachers have very high expectations and work is consistently intellectually challenging. There is a planned programme of homework that is demanding and extensive. Work is marked up to date, but some annotations could be more diagnostic to aid learning and incomplete work challenged. Time is used well to maintain a

brisk pace throughout lessons. Teachers explain the subtleties of the subject but links with other subjects and work-related learning are not promoted.

99. The relationships between the teachers and the pupils are very good. The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are very good, and pupils are well motivated; they work hard and much work is completed. Pupils record their work very well in exercise books and this helps review and revision. Some pupils clearly take great pride in their work and standards are very high. Resources that are available are used well though ICT is underused as an aid to teaching and learning. The variety of teaching strategies is limited however, and opportunities for the personal development and engagement of pupils are often overlooked. 'Assessment for learning' opportunities are not taken advantage of in lessons although the pupils listen and respond very well when open-style questions are used. Overall there is a good balance between the conceptual development of the subject and opportunities for pupils to practise newly taught skills. As a result the acquisition of new skills, knowledge and understanding is rapid.
100. The quality of leadership and management is very good. There is clarity of vision and a sense of purpose within the department to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Issues raised in the last report have been addressed and overall improvement is very good. The leadership is very well informed with respect to the curriculum and course requirements and the teaching staff an effective team committed to maintaining high standards. The departmental development plan is appropriate, though assessment for learning and self-assessment are at a very early stage. More formal numeracy links between subjects across the curriculum would make teaching more effective. The library book stock for revision, research and reading for pleasure needs to be audited and up-dated. The department needs to keep up with the developing technological trends in the subject.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

101. When pupils enter the school their numeracy skills are above average compared to national expectations. The pupils can calculate, measure, interpret information, estimate outcomes and perform a variety of numerical operations without having to rely on the calculator. The National Numeracy Strategy is consistently applied in Years 7 to 9 within the mathematics department. The pupils benefit from the 'quick fire' mental arithmetic that precedes the main part of lessons. Other departments, notably science, geography, history, physical education and design and technology, support a broad range of numerical experiences, for example in science pupils in Year 9 are required to calculate the refractive index of a variety of materials from experimental data. However, there is no systematic planning across the curriculum to build on skills and make teaching more effective. Some training to raise teachers' awareness of numeracy has taken place since the last report though the changeover of teaching staff warrants further action. There has been no audit of provision to monitor and evaluate the work of departments, for example in co-ordinating and developing the higher order levels of numeracy. There is no whole school policy on numeracy though standards in national test and examinations indicate that competency in mathematics across the curriculum is very good and is not a barrier to learning.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve very well, especially the more able and gifted pupils in Years 10 and 11.

- Too little emphasis is given to developing scientific enquiry skills and ICT is not used enough to raise standards.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, seen in the clarity of explanations and their probing questions that challenge pupils to think and explain.

## Commentary

102. Standards on entry to Year 7 are above average. In 2004, standards in national tests in Year 9 were very high; they were also well above those of other grammar schools. In relation to their standards on entry to Year 7, pupils achieved very well. The results represent a recovery compared to the previous year. Standards at GCSE in 2004 were also very high and well above those of grammar schools nationally. Pupils achieved very well in relation to their standards in Year 9 two years before. Very good proportions achieved the highest grades in chemistry and physics in particular. Since then, the department has suffered considerable staffing instability. This has resulted in disruption to timetables and to continuity for many pupils and additional workloads for teachers in their efforts to maintain standards. The school is working hard to resolve these difficulties but teaching observed during the inspection does not fully reflect that which is more typical of the department's work.
103. Standards seen during the inspection are very high in Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils achieve very well, especially those more able pupils in Years 10 and 11 studying for separate science awards at GCSE. There are several reasons for these very good achievements. Teachers have very good subject knowledge that is reflected in their very clear and accurate explanations of key concepts and principles and the challenging levels of work provided. In the better lessons, questioning is used very effectively to help pupils recall their prior learning and to encourage speculation and explanation. This was an excellent feature of a Year 11 chemistry lesson in which more able pupils compared the neutralisation of different acids and alkalis and ventured very well informed explanations of the patterns they found, showing standards considerably beyond those of GCSE. A further strength is the quality of marking, especially in chemistry and physics where regular assessment and careful analysis of responses to practice questions help pupils to improve and prepare them very well for their examinations. However, standards in scientific enquiry are not quite as high, particularly in the ability of pupils to evaluate their data and working methods; less emphasis is placed on this aspect of their work. Sometimes opportunities to practise these skills are missed where teachers adopt rather too instructional approaches to practical work so that pupils are not sufficiently engaged in making decisions for themselves. Neither is ICT used sufficiently within science, for example, to gather, process and present data from experiments.
104. Teaching and learning are good; much is very good but the overall quality has been affected by considerable changes in staffing. There is some teaching that is unimaginative and does not engage pupils in learning enough. Most lessons are well structured to engage pupils in building on previous lessons through effective starter activities; teachers summarise the key points with pupils in well-conducted closing sequences. In this respect, the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is having a positive impact. The correct use of scientific notations and vocabulary is a strong feature. In the better lessons, pupils work in groups on shared tasks that challenge them to explore and explain key ideas for themselves, often through first hand experience. However, sometimes, teaching methods do not engage the pupils and there are few checks on their understanding before moving on. Consequently, some less able pupils in

particular do not gain as much from such lessons. Homework is set regularly and most extends the learning from lessons very effectively but a minority is not completed, despite comments from teachers. Marking is good, especially in chemistry and physics where pupils receive much guidance on how to improve.

105. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection; standards have improved, although the use of ICT remains a relative weakness. The subject is well led and managed. The head of department and other staff with responsibilities provide good role models in their own teaching. The subject development plan focuses on appropriate priorities for development. Teaching is monitored and supported within the school's performance management arrangements and objectives for staff are linked to school and department priorities. However, arrangements analysing patterns in achievements and identifying pupils who may be underachieving are not systematic or used strategically to help raise standards.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good and pupils have a good relationship with their teachers.
- Pupils have not achieved as well as they should in the GCSE short course examinations.
- Resources and accommodation for ICT are very good.
- Support and guidance for the non-specialist staff are inadequate.

### **Commentary**

106. Results in the short GCSE course in 2004 were above average but below the standard achieved in similar schools and below the standard predicted from their work in Year 9. This has been the pattern of results over the last four years.
107. Achievement overall is satisfactory, but in the current groups, achievement is better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are above average; in Year 9 work is well above average and in line with the standard achieved in similar schools. Achievement is good. The trend over the last three years shows this consistently high standard being maintained. The standard of work observed in lessons in Years 10 and 11 and in assignments was above average; achievement is satisfactory.
108. By the end of Year 9, pupils are working on projects that prepare them for their GCSE courses in Year 10 and they are confident users of the school network and the ICT resources. Their skills in the use of databases and presentational software are particularly strong but skills are less well developed in using computers to take measurements and control systems.
109. The lower than expected performance at GCSE stems from previous weaknesses in provision. Until recently ICT had a very low time allocation of just 35 minutes per week in Years 7 to 9, well below the national average of one hour per week. All the pupils who sat the GCSE examination in the last four years suffered from this lack of exposure to ICT in Years 7, 8 and 9 and did not develop the practical skills needed to cope with the demands of the GCSE coursework. Informal discussions with pupils indicated that they have difficulty in completing the two coursework projects. The recent decision to double the time allocation for ICT in Years 7 to 9 and the



introduction of a full course option have significantly improved provision and preparation for GCSE examinations.

110. Teaching and learning are good. There were no unsatisfactory lessons and some very good teaching was seen. The quality of teaching by the two subject specialists in the department is consistently good but the non-specialists are less confident. These staff need support and close monitoring in order to improve the consistency of teaching received by all pupils. Arranging meetings for all those who teach ICT is not easy since the non-specialists have stronger commitment to their main subject. This makes it difficult to share good practice and resolve any difficulties.
111. Most teachers have a good relationship with their pupils. They generally have high expectations and provide good individual support to ensure pupils make good progress in lessons. In the best lessons a wide range of tasks, methods and questioning techniques are used to engage pupils and check their understanding. Planning of what is to be taught is thorough and ensures pupils experience a range of ICT skills. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate and assess their work and in Years 10 and 11 teachers are particularly conscientious in explaining to pupils how they can improve their coursework projects. In all years, the planning and delivery of lessons ensure that pupils with special educational needs are fully included and that gifted pupils are suitably stretched. The work covered in lessons helps to develop literacy and numeracy skills.
112. The leadership and management of the department are both good. Assessment data are increasingly being used to highlight underachievement and the schemes of work have been revised. This has improved the quality of learning. Increased time allocation in Years 7 to 9 and the introduction of a full GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 has enhanced provision. The knowledge, expertise and helpfulness of the network manager help the smooth running of the department and increase the use of the ICT resources across the school.
113. There has been good improvement since the last inspection; standards are improving, resources and accommodation for ICT are now very much better and the new schemes of work have improved the quality of teaching and learning.

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

114. Provision is good. The school has a suitable strategy to encourage and develop the use of ICT and has equipped the majority of teachers with their own laptop computer. Pupils make good use of computers for their work in many subjects and their general competency is good. Equipment has been introduced into most curriculum areas and this is leading to some good practice by teachers in making illustrated presentations and using specialised software applications. Very good examples were noted in physical education, where pupils analyse digital video images of movements, and in music, where electronic keyboards are connected to computers to develop pupils' composition skills. However there is insufficient use of ICT in the teaching of mathematics, geography, design and technology and art.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision for geography is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve very well In Year 9 and Year 11 and standards seen are high.
- Teaching and learning strategies are varied and very challenging and afford pupils good opportunities for taking responsibility.
- Management and leadership are excellent and assessment practice is exemplary.
- ICT use remains an area for development.

## Commentary

115. Standards on entry are above average. Very good strategies to promote geographical understanding, skills and knowledge ensure that standards are well above average in Year 9. Pupils in Year 9 studying Brazil can map, compare and explain population data. They apply geographical skills very well, producing high quality physical diagrams from work on the Dorset coast. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve very well as they gain and maintain their knowledge and skills over a range of geographical issues.
116. Results in GCSE examinations are consistently very high; all pupils attain the higher grades, mostly A or A\*. In 2003-4, pupils did much better in geography than in their other subjects. Work seen in Years 10 and 11 was well above average. Pupils are on course to reach very high examination standards similar to those attained by pupils in recent years. Pupils have very good numeracy skills; they rank development indicators, calculate dependency ratios and construct population pyramids. Issues of morality, culture, beliefs and social issues feature strongly and are well addressed. Literacy opportunities are interesting and well planned into each topic and pupils respond well with high quality writing for a range of audiences. Very good well-integrated fieldwork opportunities motivate learning, beginning in Year 7 with studying urban growth in Southend. Work on coastal processes and management at Walton-on-the-Naze demonstrates very high standards for GCSE.
117. Teaching and learning are very good in all years because work is very demanding. An excellent lesson on agrarian economics in the Philippines employed the widest range of teaching strategies, using modern and traditional resources skilfully applied to create intellectual challenge enjoyed by all. Varied strategies ensure motivation, interest and rigour, thus raising standards. Teaching is strongly focused on examination criteria; this greatly improves attainment. Marking is good, checking detail and accuracy whilst encouraging and affording critical guidance. Assessment and progress monitoring are excellent because they ensure very clear targets for improvement. Pupils are so well informed on ways to raise their attainment that they routinely suggest their own targets for improvement and this is very good. Self-assessment and peer-assessment engage pupils in all years with the processes and criteria of marking and assessment and focus their attention on strategies to improve their performance and respond to assessment opportunities. In the best lessons pupils have very good opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and engage in interactive activities that enhance key skills and develop thinking. Increasing use is made of modern technologies but this remains an area for further development, both in the frequency of opportunities for pupils to use ICT in lessons and in the use of visual material in teaching. Learning materials available to pupils via the geography department website are a very sophisticated development that is raising the quality of learning opportunities, for example by supporting work from home. All lessons are characterised by very good relationships, and readiness for learning.

118. Leadership is excellent, ensuring continuing very high standards and achievement in all areas of the department's work. Clear strategic thinking and planning for improvements has included developing teaching and learning strategies and improving schemes of work and record keeping. Literacy and numeracy development is very well integrated in all topics and citizenship opportunities are identified. There are excellent opportunities for pupils to develop fieldwork techniques. Assessment is excellent. The work of pupils is monitored across the department. Teaching effectiveness is regularly reviewed. Management is excellent.
119. Since the previous report very high standards have been maintained. Of the deficiencies noted previously, none remain. There has been very good improvement. This is a strong department with very good potential for further development.

## **History**

Provision in history is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching helps pupils to be interested in history, to achieve very well and to reach high standards in examinations.
- Very good leadership and management have created a sense of shared purpose and excellent relationships.
- Some minor aspects of teaching and the curriculum need to be developed more imaginatively.

## **Commentary**

120. In teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, results have been consistently high since 1999. Pupils have gained very high GCSE results in recent years and, with a slight dip in 2004, they do as well in history as in most of their other subjects. For current pupils, standards are already well above average and on course to be very high by the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
121. All pupils, including those with additional needs, achieve very well in relation to their above average standards at entry. They develop very good historical knowledge, understanding and skills. They show an exceptional understanding both of the need to respect evidence and to allow for different interpretations. Pupils in Year 8, for instance, engaged in a lively and perceptive discussion about the relative responsibilities of the king and parliament for the start of the English Civil War. They drew confidently on their knowledge to defend their views. By Year 11, standards are high, again showing very good achievement. Pupils build on their earlier skills and are able to research thoroughly and develop high analytical skills. GCSE coursework reflects their impressive ability to evaluate the usefulness of sources and to link cause and effect. Pupils use ICT well to develop their skills of drafting and information gathering and teachers are becoming more confident in using computers in their day-to-day teaching. The subject makes good provision to extend skills in statistical and chronological work. Teachers teach literacy well. Almost all pupils select and organise relevant information to produce accurate and structured work.
122. The quality of teaching and learning is very good with many excellent features. Teachers use their expertise and enthusiasm to enable pupils to understand what it is to be a historian. High expectations and excellent relationships cause lessons to be

rigorous and purposeful. As a result, pupils are confident to ask searching questions and to explore issues. Teachers use probing questions to extend and deepen the thinking of pupils. This was evident when a Year 9 class examined the nature of trench warfare. Skilful planning by the teacher enabled a Year 11 class to discuss objectively the controversial moral and historical issues surrounding the success or otherwise of Stalin's Five Year Plans. However, questioning in some lessons tends to concentrate on confirming what pupils know rather than causing them to think hard.

123. Very good leadership and management produce high standards and very good achievement because the teachers have high aspirations and effective teamwork and organisational skills, and teach very well. The progress and assessments of all pupils are monitored and evaluated very well and pupils are given clear advice about areas for improvement. Marking is of excellent quality. The subject improvement plan is seeking to enhance the chronological variety of historical topics covered. Overall, the subject has made good improvement since the last inspection. Teachers have enhanced assessment arrangements and aspects of their teaching and a clear improvement plan is now in place. The continuing high uptake of the subject and the consistently impressive examination and test results reflect the commitment and expertise of those who teach history.

## **Religious education**

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

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good leadership provides clear vision for the development of the subject.
- The curriculum extends and challenges all pupils.
- Very good procedures of assessment motivate pupils to improve their work.
- Pupils achieve very well and they reach very high standards in GCSE examinations.

## **Commentary**

124. GCSE results in 2004 were very high and show steady improvement over the last four years. The very high proportion of A\* and A grades achieved was a significant strength. The standards of work seen from pupils in Year 11 are already well above average. Those studying both short and full courses are on track to achieve the highest grades. Achievement is very good because pupils are prepared to engage in a very high standard of debate with the teacher, which stretches them to their limits. In a lesson in Year 11, pupils attempted by discussion to reconcile the belief in a perfect and benevolent being with a world of pain and suffering. In highly effective group work they tackled such issues as forgiveness, exploring the concepts from the point of view of religions other than their own. Independent research and empathetic and extended writing are key features of their very successful learning.
125. When pupils enter the school their overall standards are above average but they have had very varying experiences of religious education. Pupils achieve very well as they rapidly begin to connect their very good knowledge of world religions with their own spiritual lives. Writing frames help them to marshal facts so that essays are well organised and grammatically correct. Very good opportunities for independent research extend even the brightest pupils. Pupils are able to empathise very well with

the religious beliefs of others. The range of poetry written in response to lessons on Buddhism in Year 9 is outstanding. Standards are well above average.

126. Teaching is very good overall and leads to very good learning. Detailed lesson planning is based on excellent subject knowledge, which enthuses and motivates pupils. Learning tasks are very well focussed, interesting and appropriate and pupils readily engage with them. The skills of writing and knowledge of theological language are well emphasised in all lessons so that pupils produce essays of a very high standard. Work is marked carefully and pupils are left in no doubt as to how they can improve. In two lessons of excellent quality pupils became immediately and enthusiastically engaged in definitions of evil, which the teacher noted on the board before proceeding to the differences between moral and natural evil, which pupils defined for themselves in class discussion. A video clip of a Jew who refused forgiveness to a war criminal who had tormented his race provided a moving stimulus for classroom debate in which pupils were enabled to equate human forgiveness with God's compassion for mankind.
127. Leadership is very good. There is a clear vision of how the subject will develop. Management is also very good, with teaching, learning and achievement very well monitored. Curriculum leadership is also very good. Schemes of work are very well planned to provide clear learning and assessment objectives based on careful analysis of performance. This ensures that lessons are well focused and as a result pupils make the best possible progress. The curriculum is very well designed to fully challenge all groups of pupils.
128. Standards have significantly improved over the last four years and improvement is very good. The departmental has responded well to a criticism in the last report and development planning is now very well used as a tool for improvement. The department continues to make a very strong impact on the spiritual and moral development of pupils.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- Excellent leadership is influential in raising standards and there is a clear vision for improvement.
- Pupils preparing for GCSE examinations achieve very well and they reach high standards in practical work and in their design folders.
- High quality teaching resources enable the achievement of high standards across design and technology.
- Inadequate access to ICT in resistant materials and electronics hinders pupils' competence in these disciplines of design and technology.

### **Commentary**

129. Design and technology comprises courses in resistant materials, electronics and food technology. Standards achieved in the GCSE examinations have improved steadily over the last four years and in 2004 were well above the national average for all schools. They were comparable to those achieved by boys in similar schools. The highest grades have been awarded in food technology and resistant materials technology. Performance at the highest grades is high compared with all schools nationally. Results in the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average and have also improved over recent years.
130. Standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are broadly average as pupils have very different experiences in design and technology in their previous schooling. Throughout Years 7 to 9 they make rapid improvements in their practical skills and in their knowledge and understanding of materials, processes, techniques and the design process. They learn how to manipulate materials such as wood, plastics and metal, the nutritional properties of food ingredients and healthy eating, and how to design circuits and aspects of electronics and systems control. By Year 9 they show very good achievement and standards are well above average. In Years 10 and 11 pupils sustain this very good rate of achievement. The current GCSE year group demonstrates high skills in practical techniques across the three disciplines, together with the ability to carry out and act upon in-depth research and analysis within their design briefs. This is shown by the very good quality design folders, which in food technology are enriched by the excellent use of ICT for presentation, modelling of solutions, data handling and word processing. This is less evident in resistant materials and in electronics, where pupils rely more heavily on their own home based resources. There are fewer opportunities in these disciplines for computer-aided design and manufacture than would be expected. There is some scope for improvement in the quality of working drawings in some folders.
131. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are very well planned to meet the needs of all pupils. The quality of learning resources deployed is first rate and as a result pupils learn well. These materials, alongside visual exemplars, are held on the school intranet for pupils to access freely outside lessons. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use a variety of teaching strategies, to which pupils respond very well and develop positive attitudes to learning. This is evident in the volume of work produced, particularly in the GCSE course. Gifted and talented pupils are supported effectively and achieve very well. Assessment is systematic and effective and increasingly so in Years 10 and 11. Pupil progress is monitored and guidance for improvement regularly provided, including opportunities for self-assessment.
132. Leadership is excellent and management is very good; they promote very good teaching and high standards. There is a strong vision for subject development in which all staff share. Improvement planning is clear and realistic and rooted in an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. The staff work very well together but the over-reliance on part time staffing inhibits the rate of future development. Technician support is excellent and has a positive impact upon teaching and learning quality. Extra-curricular provision is excellent and is clearly being influential in encouraging rising pupil uptake and standards in the subject. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching in art and design promotes well above average standards in Years 9 and 10.
- Pupils have well developed knowledge and understanding of art history and they demonstrate good research skills.
- There are inadequate opportunities for pupils to use ICT creatively, particularly in Years 7 to 9.

### **Commentary**

133. In 2004 the GCSE results were well above the national average for all pupils and in line with those of boys in similar schools. The results at the highest grades were impressive. Pupils achieved results in art that were similar to those in most of their other subjects. However the department did not meet the school target for the average point score in 2004, even though it achieved better results than 2003. In the 2004 teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, results were well above average for all schools and matching those achieved by similar boys' schools, showing an improvement upon the previous two years. Achievement overall is good.
134. Standards on entry in art and design are broadly average. By Year 9 pupils achieve very well and as a result demonstrate well above average standards in their practical skills development, and particularly in their knowledge and understanding of art history and of other cultural traditions. They quickly acquire good observational drawing skills, use colour impressively and can work with a limited range of three-dimensional media accurately. Throughout Years 7 to 9 their competence in literacy is promoted effectively in writing about the subject and in using a specialist vocabulary, but opportunities to discuss examples of art and design are limited. Pupils are able to use the Internet confidently to seek information on artists within their coursework but have unsatisfactory opportunities to develop their creative skills in the subject using ICT, apart from the few pupils who use their home facilities.
135. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average and achievement is good as pupils tackle the demands of the GCSE course. Pupils use sketchbooks competently; they have sound drawing skills allied to strengths in art historical research. The systematic sequencing of their ideas from conception to final outcome is not always clear. More able pupils produce large, lively, bold compositions and experiment effectively with printmaking processes. More creative use of ICT is made using the two computers in the department. Standards and achievement in Year 10 are higher. Observational drawing skills are strong, research and ideas development shown in sketchbooks is easier to track and there is evidence of some high quality painting, printmaking and sculpture being produced.
136. Teaching and learning in art and design are good. Lessons are well planned and organised. Teachers use visual resources well to extend knowledge and understanding of art, and to communicate clear expectations of what is to be achieved. Positive relationships are promoted with pupils and as a result lessons are purposeful and productive and pupils have good attitudes to learning. Objectives are generally shared with pupils, with frequent use of question and answer to reinforce understanding.

However, some of the questioning needs to be more challenging so that pupils are more fully engaged in this process. Pupils behave well and can work independently, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Assessment in art is good overall. Individual support of pupils in lessons is good but the formal marking of work in Years 7 to 9 is insufficiently clear about strengths and how to improve. Pupils preparing for examinations are well supported by assessment that is clearly matched to the needs of GCSE.

137. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The subject is undergoing a period of transition with a temporary head of department. Subject development is appropriately focussed upon short-term improvements including weaknesses in the use of ICT. The teachers are well qualified and hard working, and are supported by effective technician provision. Displays in the department and school are attractive and enliven the environment. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are rising rapidly again after a period of lack of continuity in teaching. All pupils attained the highest grades at GCSE in 2004.
- Teaching, learning and achievement are very good and, at times, excellent.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons and work very enthusiastically. Numbers taking part in music courses and activities are growing rapidly.
- Leadership is outstanding.
- More specialist accommodation is needed for small group work and the recording studio needs refurbishment.

## **Commentary**

138. Standards on entry to the school are broadly average but there is a very wide range of both ability and previous musical experience. At the end of Year 9 in 2004, teacher assessments reported standards above the national average with a significant minority attaining standards well above. Work seen confirms this judgement. Pupils listen very carefully and use musical terminology accurately to describe the features and techniques of music. Their practical skills, including using music technology, are developing well. Standards, which had been affected by some lack of continuity in teaching in the last three years, are rising again and achievement is very good.
139. At the end of Year 11, examination results are well above average and all pupils attained the highest grades in 2004. Work seen in the inspection was of a similar standard. Pupils perform in various styles on a variety of instruments and some excellent playing and singing was heard. Ideas for composition are imaginative and music technology is very well used to realise them. Achievement is very good. Numbers choosing music have risen rapidly from below the national average in 2003 to double the national average in the current year.
140. Standards in instrumental lessons are well above average, and the school provides these lessons free of charge for pupils following GCSE courses. Standards in extra-curricular music are very high and the department makes a very impressive contribution to school life through the many and varied musical activities it offers. Instrumental teachers offer very good support and lead some of the groups.
141. Teaching and learning are very good overall. They are never less than good and very good and outstanding teaching was seen. Lessons are well planned with a variety of tasks that



widen understanding of the chosen topic. Good use of inclusive, clear questioning and well-chosen examples ensure a secure knowledge and understanding and the lessons move at a very good pace. Subject skills of teachers are very good. In the best lessons, teaching is very lively and pupils are fully involved in active learning experiences. Their enthusiasm and enjoyment are obvious and teaching is very encouraging. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their pupils, who are clearly aware of how they can improve their work. They develop good independent learning skills yet also work very well together.

142. Curriculum leadership is outstanding. The head of department has an excellent vision for the future development of the department. He has made a considerable impact in a relatively short time, not just in the department but also in promoting the contribution of music to the ethos of the school and pupils' personal development. The instrumental teachers are very well led and supported. Management is very good. The curriculum has been re-written. It is well designed with very good progression across the key stages. Pupils study a good range of styles through performing, listening and composing and very good use is made of music technology. Assessment procedures are being developed for the new curriculum. More emphasis on National Curriculum levels is needed in Years 7 to 9 with more recordings of the work of pupils for their appraisal. The accommodation is of good quality but this very successful department is out-growing the space available and more rooms are needed for small group teaching. Resources for music technology are very good for the current needs but refurbishment of the recording studio is needed to record work in Years 7 to 9. More resources for world music instruments are also needed.

143. The improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. With the necessary support in resources the department is very well poised to move even further forward.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Achievement is very good, particularly in GCSE examinations in sports studies where results are consistently very high.
- Very good teaching is leading to very good learning.
- The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success.
- Teaching and learning benefit from excellent accommodation and very good ICT resources.
- Curriculum links with partner primary schools are underdeveloped.

### **Commentary**

144. Standards in the GCSE sports studies examination in 2004 were very high compared to the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades was significant. Results were, however, below those attained in most other subjects. Results in the previous three years have been consistently very high, in line with their performances in other subjects. Standards seen in lessons and in the work of Year 9 pupils are above average; this represents good achievement when compared with their average standards on entry at Year 7 and their widely differing experiences of physical education. Standards of Year 11 pupils are well above average in core physical education and very high in examination classes; this represents very good achievement.

145. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in all year groups. Teachers have a very good command of their subject. Lessons are challenging and expectations of pupils are high. Work is planned to suit all pupils. Teachers make very good use of ICT resources to enhance learning and provide very good opportunities for pupils to learn independently. In a Year 10 GCSE lesson, the teacher made very effective use of video clips and a computer-generated presentation to help pupils learn about 'skills acquisition'. Pupils were involved in planning skills drills, evaluating performance and coaching small groups. Teachers use assessment data very well to inform individual pupil needs and curriculum planning. The very good extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for all pupils to extend their learning.
146. The subject contributes very well to the development of very good numeracy, literacy and ICT skills. Learning is enhanced by the very positive attitudes of pupils. Participation rates are very high and relationships very good.
147. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success and is ably supported by a dedicated team of specialists. Very good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and standards. Links with partner primary schools are underdeveloped and as a result, provide limited information to aid curriculum planning in Year 7, or to help raise the average standards of pupils on entry to the school. The subject makes a very good contribution to the personal development of pupils. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Standards and the quality of teaching have risen further; accommodation is now excellent and all teaching undertaken by specialists.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

*Work was sampled in business education.*

148. Results in the **business education** short course GCSE in 2004 were very high with almost all pupils gaining higher grades. Two lessons were seen with pupils in Year 11. They made clear gains in their knowledge and understanding of business practice; teaching and learning were good.

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

*Citizenship was inspected in full and personal and social education (PSE) was sampled.*

149. Lessons in **PSE** were seen in each of Years 7 to 10. Teaching and learning were very good, especially when lessons included opportunities for active learning. The development of empathy with children less fortunate than themselves was a strong feature of lessons seen.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership is excellent and has welded together a strong and diverse teaching team.

- The curriculum provides excellent guidance to teachers and provides interest and challenge to all pupils.
- Achievement is very good and standards are exceptionally high.

## Commentary

150. Citizenship is not taught and assessed as a separate subject in Years 7 to 9. Results in the GCSE short course examination in 2004, the first in which pupils were entered, were exceptionally high. There was a very high proportion of A\* and A grades, eight times higher than the national figure. Standards of current pupils in Years 10 and 11 are also very high in the classes taking the GCSE examination. Standards in the non-examination classes are above average. Achievement overall is very good as pupils rapidly develop knowledge and understanding in this new subject. Year 10 pupils were observed in formal debate on press issues of privacy in which they received clear, specific instruction on procedure. This activity provided a very good introduction to active citizenship. Pupils showed exceptionally good skills of oral expression as they enjoyed the cut and thrust of debate. In a lesson on media bias, pupils analysed newspaper articles with a view to what might be hidden to fulfil a political intention. This promoted a very high standard of analysis. Writing standards are exceptionally high, providing a strong basis for further study. Prose styles show sophisticated skills of expression and logical, reasoned argument. An exceptionally strong feature of writing is the thorough way in which highly complex issues are analysed and explored.
151. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. Lessons have clear objectives and are well focused to enable all to learn successfully. The promotion of literacy, oracy and the use of ICT is very good and integral in all planning. Learning is based on challenge. The interest and engagement of pupils are, at times, absolute. The teachers have extensive subject knowledge; this informs all teaching and learning and motivates pupils to study independently.
152. The subject has been introduced very successfully. Teachers have been well deployed and are now welded into a strong and diverse team. Curricular leadership is excellent. Schemes of work are detailed and thorough and guide non-specialist teachers well. Curriculum planning for the delivery of citizenship as part of personal and social education in Years 7, 8 and 9 is very good and ensures that requirements are met despite the low allocation of time given to the subject. Management is confident and very well informed. Day to day procedures are reliable and unbureaucratic. A high standard of analysis of teaching and learning determines and informs the very good level of decision making which has resulted in such exceptionally high standards.
153. A valuable community based exercise forms the basis for active citizenship and independent research of high quality. All pupils participate in a range of local services such as schools, and national organisations such as Amnesty International. The subject links effectively with charitable activities within the school. Extra-curricular activities are of impressive quality and range and are successfully designed to widen horizons and increase the social and political awareness of pupils.
154. The subject was not reported in the last inspection so it is not possible to comment on improvement.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, nine 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	1	100.0	70.5	0.0	14.9	30.0	24.1
Biology	12	75.0	60.6	16.7	9.9	29.2	18.7
Chemistry	10	90.0	68.2	10.0	12.3	28.0	22.1
Economics	5	100	69.5	60.0	16.8	48.0	24.6
English literature	1	100	82.6	0.0	16.1	30.0	28.0
French	6	100	78.9	33.3	19.3	41.7	28.0
Design and technology	6	100	68.1	50.0	10.0	41.7	21.7
Geography	7	100	72.6	57.1	17.1	47.1	25.0
German	2	100	80.7	0.0	18.1	40.0	28.2
History	7	100	80.5	14.3	17.5	35.7	27.7
Information technology	1	100	64.9	0.0	8.1	40.0	20.0
Mathematics	18	66.7	55.7	11.1	11.9	21.1	19.6
Other sciences	1	100	64.9	100	12.5	60.0	21.3
Other social studies	6	83.3	64.2	0.0	11.1	23.3	20.9
Physics	9	88.9	62.0	11.1	11.0	32.2	20.0
Religious studies	3	100	77.3	33.3	21.3	43.3	27.8
Spanish	1	100	78.9	0.0	23.4	40.0	28.5
Sports/PE studies	2	100	70.3	0.0	9.0	30.0	21.2

**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	9	100	98.3	88.9	50.2	106.7	87.1
Biology	29	93.1	96.6	48.3	10.0	81.4	79.3
Chemistry	32	96.9	97.7	59.4	50.0	90.6	85.7
Economics	29	100	98.8	82.8	54.3	104.8	89.8
English/English language	13	100	99.2	76.9	36.4	103.1	81.1
English literature	12	100	99.4	75.0	44.9	100	85.5
French	10	100	99.0	70.0	53.1	98.0	88.9
General studies	115	96.5	94.9	50.4	30.5	86.4	72.9
Geography	36	100	98.8	77.8	46.4	102.2	85.2
German	7	100	98.6	71.4	49.6	97.1	86.3
History	47	100	99.0	66.0	45.6	96.6	85.1
Information technology	5	100	96.3	60.0	25.7	88.0	71.1
Mathematics	51	98.0	96.8	68.6	56.6	97.3	89.5
Music	6	100	98.2	16.7	37.1	66.7	79.5
Other sciences	9	100	97.4	77.8	44.2	106.7	82.5
Other social studies	33	100	97.4	54.5	42.5	90.3	81.6
Physics	31	96.8	96.7	51.6	45.3	87.1	82.6
Sports/PE studies	6	100	97.8	83.3	30.9	110.0	75.4

**ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

*The focus was on English literature and French. The combined English language and literature course was sampled.*

155. Results in **English language and literature** are consistently well above average. In the lessons seen, students responded maturely and enthusiastically to a range of challenging texts and activities, showing confidence, independence and an excellent grasp of linguistic theories and critical awareness. Because entry requirements are lower for the combined course than for literature only, performance in these lessons represented excellent achievement.

**English literature**

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

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The leadership of the department is excellent.
- Very good teaching ensures that learning is challenging and enjoyable.

- Students achieve very well and they reach standards that are well above the national average.
- Improvement since the previous inspection is very good.

### **Commentary**

156. A-level results for 2004 were well above average, and show an improvement over the two previous years. More than three out of every four students regularly gain grades A or B. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above those of students nationally. The highest attaining students write with controlled assurance. Their writing on *The Return of the Native*, Friel's *Translations* and the poets of the Great War, for example, is particularly perceptive and sensitive and shows very good critical and analytical skills as well as a close and thorough understanding of the texts. Students are also very aware of the moral, social and cultural influences upon the writers they study and how these influence their works. Essays are thoroughly planned and researched; students show maturity in their writing and arguments and their interpretations are well justified. Personal responses to all three literary genres show that students are confident enough to have independent and sometimes controversial views and to justify them well.
157. Standards on entry to the sixth form are well above average. Students achieve very well throughout the course as they make and sustain comprehensive gains in their learning. Because of their own positive and eager attitudes and very good teaching, their writing, research and oral skills mature rapidly in the sixth form. Activities such as a good range of theatre visits, lectures and university links, together with curriculum links with history and school drama, considerably enhance the learning experiences. Excellent relationships, between students and with their teachers, also make a considerable contribution to achievement. Students work very well, both independently and collaboratively, and enjoy their lessons, particularly when researching topics which they have chosen themselves, using their computer skills, engaging in dramatic approaches to texts, debating or giving presentations.
158. Teaching and learning are very good overall, and often excellent. Assessment and marking are used very effectively to show students what they need to do to improve and to set them targets. All teachers have very good subject knowledge, high expectations of their students and plan well to make lessons relevant, challenging and enjoyable, as well as to ensure academic and intellectual rigour. Additionally, there is a considerable focus on independent learning: hence students take responsibility for their own progress, readily share their ideas, evaluate their own work and bring their own research into the classroom. Students are inspired by their teachers and clearly share their enthusiasm for literature.
159. The leadership of this dedicated team of teachers is excellent. The head of department encourages and supports staff well, and sets a fine example of scholarship, commitment and dedication. In a short time he has revitalised the department. Student numbers have increased, retention rates are very high and the recently introduced language and literature course is proving popular and very successful. Management is very good. The department is a thinking department that regularly evaluates its own performance and shares best practice and is constantly looking for ways to improve even further. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. High standards and very good achievement have been maintained. All teaching is now consistently very good because teachers use a much wider range of teaching methods, which encourage students to be confident and independent learners.

## **French**

Provision in French is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in examinations have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Students develop a broad range of skills as they progress through the course.

- The quality of teaching is very good and students are given constructive advice on how to improve their work.
- Very good leadership and management of the course have improved recruitment and raised standards.

## Commentary

160. In the 2004 GCE A-level examinations all students passed and more than two-thirds gained A or B grades. This is above the national average. More than three-quarters of students entered have gained A or B grades in the last three years, which is well above the national average. This is very good improvement compared to the last inspection, when standards were average.
161. Students enter the course with a very good foundation of grammatical knowledge. They build on this rapidly and within a few months are writing extended essays with good elements of style and vocabulary appropriate to the topic. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above average. In Year 13 they are doing extensive reading and writing on the set text *Un sac de billes*, which helps to develop a wide vocabulary and fluency in written style. Essay writing is of a high standard, with students demonstrating high levels of accuracy and interesting use of language and stylistic features. Speaking skills are also developed well through consistent practice in interpreting skills, where students show the capacity to think quickly and use French confidently and accurately. Achievement is very good because although students enter the course with well above average GCSE grades, they extend their skills and knowledge in a broad range of contexts.
162. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The approach is intellectually demanding and this is reflected in how students understand complex grammar such as the subjunctive and in the well-argued essay writing, the best of which is outstanding. The course is carefully planned and this is seen in the structured approach to studying set texts. Good use is made of collaborative approaches to learning, with students working in pairs or small groups, including when doing listening work in the language laboratory. Marking and assessment are very thorough and detailed written comments give students very good guidance on how to improve. There are good opportunities for students to develop their speaking in lessons through the planned activities, but students are not sufficiently encouraged to use French for routine activities such as asking questions.
163. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Increasing numbers of students are being attracted onto the course and standards have risen since the last inspection. The detailed planning of the course and the supportive approach to marking and assessment are particular strengths. Students enjoy the course and are complimentary about the quality of teaching. They would like an opportunity for an exchange or a visit to France. Retention rates are excellent. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection.

## MATHEMATICS

*The focus was mathematics and work in further mathematics was sampled.*

164. Work in **further mathematics** was seen in Year 12 and Year 13. Standards at A-level are very high compared to national figures. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades is



very high. In the lessons seen, the quality of teaching and learning was very good with the students contributing as much in lessons as the teacher.

## Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Relationships between the teacher and the students are excellent.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.
- ICT is underused as an aid to learning.

### Commentary

165. Standards in the 2004 GCE A-level examination were well above average. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades was above average. Current standards of work seen by Year 13 students are well above average and they are achieving well. Students maintain files that contain evidence of much work completed and provide a very good record for review and revision. Students recall knowledge very well and apply it in their written work and discussion, often contributing as much as the teacher in lessons. For example, students applied their knowledge of moments to solve problems on the equilibrium of rigid bodies.
166. Standards in the 2004 GCE AS-level mathematics examination were broadly in line with the national average. This was unsatisfactory achievement as standards were below those expected from their standards at GCSE. Standards of work seen by current Year 12 students, however, are well above average, ranging from very high to above average when compared to national expectations, and students are achieving well. They are well into the new courses, making very good use of previous GCSE work to move into new areas of study. For example, the students applied the rules of algebra very well when answering questions on the coordinate geometry of circles.
167. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; they are aware of the broader picture and course requirements, though use of work-related exemplars and links with other subjects are not sufficiently developed. The teachers have very high expectations of the students and lessons are planned well with clear objectives. The teachers are aware of the next stages in the learning and the pace of lessons is brisk, but the arrangements for monitoring how well students understand need to be employed more frequently. The relationship between the teacher and the students is excellent. The students work hard and make very good progress, building on previously taught skills. Work is intellectually challenging and deepens understanding, though opportunities for speculation, explanation and investigation are uncommon. Teaching would be even better if student learning was less dependent on the teacher, with more opportunities for collaborative work, thus enabling students to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding. The quality and quantity of written work produced by the students is very good, aiding review and revision. ICT is underused as a resource for teaching and learning. Homework is set regularly and marked up to date though diagnostic annotations are not related to targets set for students.
168. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Issues raised at the time of the last report have been addressed and standards have improved. There is a range of appropriate courses to meet the needs of all students, in particular the higher attaining students. Retention rates are very high. Procedures for assessment are very good. There is an emerging team of subject specialist teachers committed to raising standards further. The teachers are approachable and are

prepared to give up their time outside lessons to support the students. Accommodation is satisfactory but there are limited resources to enhance learning; in particular, ICT is not exploited.

## SCIENCES

### Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and positive attitudes from students help them to achieve well and reach well above average standards.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good.
- Laboratory accommodation is inadequate; some lessons take place in classrooms and there is insufficient practical work in Year 13.

#### Commentary

169. Between 2001 and 2003, results in the GCE A-level and AS-level examinations were consistently well above average and in line with standards achieved in similar schools. In 2004, results at A-level and AS-level dropped slightly but were still above average, with a large majority of students meeting or exceeding the grades predicted for them, based on their prior attainment at GCSE. The drop in attainment at A-level came with a change in the choice of an option module. The review of the breakdown of marks showed that performance in this module was well below that in the other five units. The current Year 13 students are studying the original option and a return to the normal, well above average, attainment is predicted this year.
170. Students enter the sixth form with well above average standards. The general standard over the last four years at AS and A-level is also well above average. To sustain this standard of attainment represents good achievement. The large majority of students meet or exceed their predictions based on prior attainment and there is no significant difference between students with different needs and backgrounds. The general quality of work observed in lessons and from the scrutiny of work confirms that standards are well above the national average, although the spread of ability is wider than one normally sees in a grammar school. Retention rates during the course are very good with very few students withdrawing. The percentage that progress from AS to A-level is also good.
171. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Learning objectives are fully explained at the outset and the interest of the students is quickly captured by a suitable starter activity. For example, a Year 12 lesson started with a review of an examination paper question, to be completed before the end of the lesson but not immediately. This quickly engaged the interest of the students and made them think about previously covered work on adaptation. The teacher very skilfully moved from the examination question to a well-constructed computer-generated presentation to teach the new material on the adaptations of hydrophytes. A common weakness in some other lessons, however, was the lack of variety in the tasks and stimuli offered to the students. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on 'diabetes mellitus' the only stimuli used were the blackboard and the overhead projector. Similarly, in a lesson involving the examination of blood cells using microscopes an opportunity was missed to use the video-cam to show large images of blood cells from the microscope to the whole group before students looked individually. This would have prevented some student confusion and made the learning much more efficient. It is often only due to the very good subject knowledge of the teachers, the clarity of explanations and their high expectations that the interest of the students is maintained.
172. The arrangements for monitoring the progress of the students are good, with essays and module tests regularly being set. Discussions with students show that they greatly appreciate the degree of detail offered in the feedback comments but routine work is less conscientiously checked. Students in Year 12 feel they have about the right amount of practical work but those

in Year 13 feel there is far too little. Those continuing from AS to A-level thoroughly enjoy the field trip at the end of Year 12 and feel well prepared for the coursework assignment on seashore ecology. During the AS and A-level courses there is good development of communication, numeracy and ICT skills.

173. The leadership and management of biology provision are both good. Good procedures are in place for the assessment and monitoring of progress but there is still room for improvement in the system used to set targets and reliably make value-added measures. The AS-level biology handbook is a good innovation, liked by the students, and ideally should be matched by an equivalent booklet for Year 13. The head of department has good organisational skills and leads a strongly unified team of knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers who all share a strong commitment to continued improvement. Biology is a popular subject and staff enjoy very good relationships with the students.
174. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have improved, particularly the percentage obtaining grades A and B, and the number of students opting for AS-level biology has increased. ICT resources for teaching and learning are also much better now. Resources are generally good but the laboratory accommodation is inadequate with some lessons having to take place in classrooms.

## **Chemistry**

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well, particularly the more able, and there is a pattern of rising standards over time.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and this helps students develop a very good grasp of key facts and principles.
- In some lessons, there are too few checks on how students understand new work.
- The subject is well led and managed by a highly committed subject leader.
- Examination results are reviewed to guide curricular improvements but not enough is done to evaluate patterns in achievements over time.

## **Commentary**

175. Standards on entry in Year 12 are mainly well above average, although a significant proportion of students enter with above average standards. Standards at GCE A-level in 2004 were above average; of the 31 students entered, a high proportion achieved grades A or B and almost all of them passed. In Year 12, nine of the ten students entered for AS-level passed and standards overall were also above average. The results represent a significant improvement over the previous year. There has also been a rise in numbers taking up the course in recent years.
176. Standards seen during the inspection are slightly better than last year and are well above average; students achieve well, particularly the more able students, who show very high standards. Students acquire a good grasp of key principles during their course and teachers work closely to ensure that they make connections between different aspects of the subject as they learn. Key principles are taught rigorously, reflecting the very good subject expertise teachers have. For example, Year 13 students made very good progress as they discussed chemical reactions with their teacher, who provided some carefully chosen examples that were graded for increasing challenge. Students gave well argued explanations in response to very

probing questions and a very clear commentary by the teacher enabled all to gain much in their understanding. Some examples of reactions chosen were drawn from several branches of chemistry to ensure students applied their learning broadly.

177. The correct and precise use of technical vocabulary and notation is a constant feature of all lessons. Students also acquire good practical skills and investigational skills. Students make good use of their above average numeracy skills, for example in calculating the pH values of solutions. Year 13 students achieved well in deducing some chemical features of three unknown materials they were given as they applied a range of tests. Most could explain the nature of the tests applied, and their inferences were carefully considered in the light of the evidence they had gathered and showed a very good grasp of the underlying chemistry. Their teacher provided very good advice and guidance on practical techniques that is preparing them very well for their examination.
178. In Year 12 the classes are larger and the range of ability amongst students is wider. Standards seen are well above average overall and the more able show very high standards, for example, in explaining the chemistry of alcohols and features of their chemical structures. In whole class discussions, questioning is sometimes dominated by more confident and able students and the understanding of those less able students tends to be assumed because too few checks on what they know are built into the lesson structure.
179. Teaching and learning are good overall, and often very good. Teachers are strongly committed to their students and relationships are very good. Class discussions where key principles are applied are a strong feature, particularly in the early part of lessons, where students consolidate what they have learned. In the better lessons, students work at tasks for themselves, and teachers monitor their work and discuss misconceptions with individuals to ensure all can progress well. Another strong feature is the very good marking and feedback given to students through the regular use of practice questions; consequently students know their strengths and weaknesses and are prepared very well for examinations. Some teaching tends to focus on the underlying theory before moving on to first hand practical experience. Consequently some students simply commit to memory and cannot easily visualise what is being discussed. Pupils enjoy the subject and feel they are challenged and taught very well. They appreciate the guidance given on their use of study time and recommendations for further research, including the use of the Internet.
180. Standards have risen and good improvement has been made since the last inspection. The subject is well led and managed by a highly committed and knowledgeable subject leader. He is a very good role model to others in his own teaching. Teaching quality is monitored and supported and patterns in examination results are evaluated to help focus areas for improvement in the planned curriculum. However, students are not yet set individual targets based on their prior attainment that could act as benchmarks of their achievement as they progress. Consequently, there is no rigorous evaluation of patterns in value added to guide the subject leader's work.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

*ICT in the sixth form was sampled.*

181. In the ICT lessons seen, teaching was good and standards well above average. The number of students opting for ICT in the sixth form is disappointingly low, however, and

the small number of students recruited for the AS-level course receive their lessons in the neighbouring girls' grammar school.

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

182. Students make good use of the ICT facilities within departments and have access to the ICT suites at lunchtime. This compensates for the paucity of ICT resources in the library. The standard of the students' ICT skills is above average, particularly in research, word processing and desk-top-publishing tasks.

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

### **Physical education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve very well and A-level results are consistently very high.
- Teaching is very good and meets individual needs very well.
- The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success.
- Excellent accommodation and very good ICT resources support learning.
- Subject reference material in the library needs updating.

### **Commentary**

183. The GCE A-level results in 2004 were very high and represented very good achievement for most students. The proportion of students gaining a higher grade pass (A or B), in both the AS-level and A-level examinations, is consistently very high and better than their performance in most other subjects. Retention rates on A-level courses are very high. Higher attaining students are successful in a range of sports at county, national and sometimes international levels.

184. Standards of work seen from Year 12 and Year 13 students are very high and show very good improvement from their above average attainment on entry to the sixth form; they are achieving very well. Students have an excellent understanding of the main concepts and theories; they handle numerical data extremely well and most show very high levels of extended writing skills. Students research work very well and use excellent technical language. They make extensive use of ICT to enhance both their learning and presentation skills.

185. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in Years 12 and 13. Teachers show very wide subject knowledge and are very aware of how students learn; they work hard to use methods and resources that meet their needs. In an A-level theory lesson the teacher used computer-generated presentation, through the interactive whiteboard and research tasks, to reinforce the political issues that have historically affected the Olympic games. Students are very appreciative of the support that they receive; the overall monitoring and mentoring of students is very good. Teachers have very high expectations and students respond very positively. Written assignments are marked

regularly and very good diagnostic comments ensure that students know how to improve.

186. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success. Very good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and improve standards. Students are timetabled for games and recreational sport and many take advantage of this. Subject related reference material, in the school library, is in need of updating to provide additional support for student research. Valid judgements on improvement since the last inspection cannot be made, due to the lack of reference to sixth form physical education in the report; however, A-level studies have been very successfully introduced and an excellent sports hall complex built.

## HUMANITIES

*The focus subjects were geography, history and psychology. Work in geology, religious education and politics was sampled.*

187. **Geology** has been one of the highest performing subjects over the last three years, ensuring that students make excellent progress in building on the very good attainment in GCSE geology. Standards are very high at AS-level and at A-level. Teaching seen was of a very high quality, resulting in very good achievement and a very positive ethos for learning. Students in Year 13 were experienced and confident in geological map work and very well prepared for examination.
188. In the work seen in **religious education** teaching and learning were very good. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and the level of challenge and expectation was very high. The student response was equal to the challenge, with some very impressive contributions from the higher attaining students, who were able to elaborate, drawing from their other subjects and wider reading. Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
189. In the Year 12 **politics** lesson observed and in the work analysis, standards were well above average. Very good teaching is helping students to increase their knowledge and understanding of the syllabus, including the British constitution.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results are high and students do significantly better in geography than in their other subjects.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, experience and enthusiasm.
- Lessons have clear structure, are well planned and resourced and fieldwork opportunities are excellent.
- Assessment arrangements are excellent.
- Detail, exemplification and reference to key ideas and terminology are weak in a minority of lessons.

## Commentary

190. Over the last two years all students have been successful in A-level examinations, with a trend of improvement in attainment and increasing student numbers. In 2004 over three-quarters of those entered attained the highest A and B grades. These students did significantly better in geography than in their other subjects. The students taking AS-level examinations in 2004 also did well, with most gaining the higher grades. Results in geography are well above national averages and in the top quarter of schools nationally. Almost all students complete the full two-year course.
191. Standards on entry are well above average in GCSE examinations. Observation of lessons and analysis of work show that standards are well above average and achievement is good. Very good literacy and numeracy skills contribute well to good achievement in geography.
192. Students show good knowledge of a range of atmospheric systems, with detailed work in Year 13 on El Niño and variations in global pressures and wind patterns. Case studies are used well to exemplify their understanding of theory and so raise examination performance. Lessons include a thorough debate of trans-national corporations and their role in the new international division of labour and moral issues of the employment practices of some companies. In lessons some students do not routinely give detail and exact figures to support their statements. For example, in one lesson Year 13 students did not demonstrate, in oral work, knowledge of key ideas and terminology appropriate at A-level. In written work standards are higher. Year 12 students studying human and physical environments demonstrate very good data inclusion, exemplification, detail, process awareness and the ability to link common elements of differing locations. Map and graph use and interpretation are very good. Students display a wide range of skills and produce assignments of a very high standard. There is good growth in geographical maturity in writing by the second A-level year. Students make very effective use of new technologies, including the Internet, to enhance the accuracy, range and presentation of their work, for example in using photographs on liquification in tectonic activity.
193. Teaching and learning are very good because expectations are very high. Up to the minute sources are employed very well to provide relevant, topical and interesting information, statistics, photographs and articles to challenge higher attaining students and extend others. Assessment practices are excellent and students have clear targets. Good peer marking and self-assessment opportunities are effective in enhancing understanding of the examination marking process. Progress is constantly and very effectively monitored. Teachers know the learning needs of students very well and so give effective individual guidance that improves understanding and motivation and greatly contributes to high standards. Teachers provide very good support with clear guidance on how to reach expected standards. Instruction can occasionally be too didactic; this limits opportunity for students to test their understanding of new learning through discussion and activity. Students learn very productively when cooperating with peers, as when preparing presentations on aspects of regional differences in Italy.
194. Students display very positive attitudes, participate with enthusiasm and speak highly of the quality of the teacher support and encouragement they receive. Fieldwork opportunities are excellent. In addition to work in England, students also have opportunities to study in Scotland, Spain, Iceland and USA in conjunction with those studying geology.
195. Work in the subject has excellent leadership; the drive for excellence is a key feature in



the maintenance of high standards at A-level. There is excellent management and planning and rigorous analysis. Teachers are very well motivated and focused on achieving very high results for their students. Some very good use is made of new technologies that enhance teaching and learning. Standards are higher than at the previous inspection and overall improvement is good.

## History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well and A-level results are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are very good; teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subject and prepare challenging lessons, which help students to develop the ability to hypothesise, analyse and deduce.
- Very good leadership and management provide very effective support to all groups of students.
- There are occasional weaknesses in the variety and effectiveness of approaches to teaching and learning.

### Commentary

196. History is a popular subject in the sixth form. Retention on courses is high for those who start the AS-level and A-level courses. A-level results in 2004 were well above average, as they have been in recent years, and the majority of students gained the highest grades. Four out of every five of the candidates achieved an A or B grade in 2003 and made much better progress than expected from their GCSE results, reflecting very good achievement. AS-level results were well above average in 2004.
197. In Year 12, standards seen are well above average on the AS-level course. Students use a very wide range of historical skills to produce structured arguments in very well written essays. They understand how political, social, religious and economic factors affect history. In a lesson on the early political differences between Strasser and Hitler, students demonstrated a sure grasp of historiography. In Year 13, they build on these very competent foundations to hypothesise, analyse and deduce cogently when faced with historical problems such as the reasons for the decline of the Liberal Party. In Year 13, standards of work seen are well above average and achievement is very good.
198. Very good teaching with many excellent features reinforces these achievements. Teachers show excellent subject knowledge and convey a sense of enthusiasm. Students respond keenly to the emphasis on rigour. They take pleasure in scholarship that develops their higher-order skills of analysis and investigation in written work and discussion. In this respect, the excellent use of questioning and ICT led to students being able to develop some cogent hypotheses for Hitler's electoral success. In some lessons, however, debate would have been more informed had there been a greater insistence on students knowing about the subject before discussing it in the lesson. However, students are prepared to participate fully in discussions, mainly as a result of their excellent rapport with teachers. An emphasis on structuring essays to meet the highest grade criteria results in very high quality work but occasionally note-taking falls below the highest standards. Thorough marking provides detailed guidance for

improvement. Teachers use performance data very well to set students targets and to measure their progress.

199. Very good leadership and management are maintaining standards and the quality of teaching. There is a clear link between the overall departmental strategy to maintain and improve standards and the structures to support it. Thus, the sequencing of topics and themes and the careful planning and organisation of the curriculum make a substantial contribution to the very good quality of teaching and learning. The department is developing the use of ICT and the Internet satisfactorily to support learning. History makes an effective contribution to the development of students' literacy and communication skills. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, in terms of standards, teaching and the overall quality of provision.

## **Psychology**

Provision in psychology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Assessment and marking are good and support ongoing improvement in learning.
- Learning is enhanced by the effort and commitment of students to their work.
- Psychology makes a good contribution to the personal development of students.
- Some aspects of teaching lack challenge and expectation.
- Not all students have the skills to meet the demands of the course.

## **Commentary**

200. Results in A-level examinations in 2004 were above the national average, although lower than in previous years. AS-level grades in 2004 were in line with the national average, as in the previous year.
201. Every student is welcome to take psychology, and the subject attracts the whole range of ability. There is no psychology course at GCSE but overall standards on entry are broadly average. By the end of Year 13, achievement is good. The standard of work seen in the current Year 13 is above the national average at A-level. The most able students do very well because their sound research and extended writing skills ensure that they produce some high quality, well researched and closely argued investigations and critiques. Less able students struggle with the theoretical aspects and demonstrate weaker evaluation skills, and many lack the literacy skills to meet easily the demands of the course. However, extended writing skills improve over time because of very helpful marking which really shows them how to improve. Standards in the current Year 12 differ markedly from previous years, being well above average at this stage.
202. Teaching and learning are both good, with some aspects that are satisfactory. Good teaching is characterised by clear explanation, very effective use of video clips, which flesh out theory, and constant checking of understanding and the involvement of students in their own learning. For example, they research topics, which they then present to the whole group. This encourages independent learning. They have to make a real intellectual effort and learn more securely through self and peer assessment. On occasion there is a lack of challenge and expectation from the teacher, especially in questioning that is not rigorous, and the quality of response from some students suffers. Retention rates are very good. Students find psychology of genuine interest

and this contributes to their commitment and effort both during and beyond lessons. Assessment and monitoring of work are good. The marking of assignments is detailed and comments clarify and indicate how improvement can be made. As a result the work of students improves over time.

203. Leadership and management are both good. There is a commitment to improvement, both in teaching and learning styles and the quality of advice available to students before they embark on the A-level course. The subject makes a good contribution to the personal development of students, which they readily acknowledge, both in self-understanding and the study of human behaviours and motivation. There is no judgement on improvement, as this subject was not reported on in the last inspection.

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

*Work was sampled in art and design and in music.*

204. Standards in **art and design** in the sixth form are well above average for all schools. Teaching and learning in the lessons seen were good, and as a result students achieved well, improving their practical ability and capacity to build upon their art historical research in a personal direction.
205. In the work seen in **music** standards were above average and students achieved very well. Teaching and learning were very good. Resources are very good but the subject is improving in popularity and is outgrowing available accommodation. Some lessons are held in non-specialist rooms, which limits practical work.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

*Work was sampled in general studies.*

206. All students in the sixth form follow a **general studies** course leading to A-level examinations. Results have been above average in the last three years and numbers achieving the highest grades are rising. In the sample seen, teaching and learning were good. The course is taught in both seminar and lecture styles and the pupils make a good contribution to discussions, building on their understanding of history and current affairs.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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