

INSPECTION REPORT

**THE BISHOPS' BLUE COAT CHURCH OF ENGLAND
HIGH SCHOOL**

Great Boughton, Chester

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111455

Headteacher: Robert Haigh

Lead inspector: William Baxendale

Dates of inspection: 20th – 23rd September 2004.

Inspection number: 269519

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1033
School address:	Vaughans Lane Great Boughton Chester Cheshire
Postcode:	CH3 5XF
Telephone number:	01244 313806
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Walter Done OBE
Date of previous inspection:	11 th October 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Bishops' Blue Coat School is an average-sized 11-18 voluntary aided mixed comprehensive school with 1033 pupils of whom 145 are students in the sixth form. It is increasingly popular, drawing pupils from a very wide area around Chester. There are slightly more girls than boys, especially in the sixth form. There is little pupil movement into or away from the school, other than in the usual years. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, which are on the whole average. Very low numbers of pupils are from ethnic minorities and very few have English as a second language. The number on the special needs (dyslexia, moderate learning and social, emotional and behavioural) register is below average and the number of pupils with statements is average. The school successfully acquired Science College status in 2004. Attainment on entry was average when those examined in national tests and GCSE examinations in 2003/4 started the school. The attainment of those now in Year 7 was above average when they entered the school.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
02928	Bill Baxendale	Lead inspector	Modern foreign languages (main school)
13786	Susan Walsh	Lay inspector	
19698	Dave Hirons	Lay inspector	
19041	Roger Linstead	Team inspector	English (main school)
30702	Paul Bowers	Team inspector	Mathematics (main school, sixth form)
1407	Peter Scott	Team inspector	Science (main school)
34255	David Mulholland	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (main school)
3548	Gwyn Hughes	Team inspector	Design and technology
12118	Alan Paver	Team inspector	Geography (main school, sixth form)
7399	Paul Roberts	Team inspector	History (main school)
30072	Joseph Skivington	Team inspector	Music (main school); Health and social care (sixth form)
20192	Terry McDermott	Team inspector	Physical education
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Business studies (sixth form)
13217	Malcolm Butterworth	Team inspector	Special educational needs and citizenship
12499	Marie Durkin	Team inspector	English (sixth form)
21866	David Tracey	Team inspector	Chemistry (sixth form)

The inspection contractor was:

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	10
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	15
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	22
OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES	25
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	26
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	51

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The Bishops' Blue Coat Church of England High School is a **good and rapidly improving school** that has very strong, fruitful links with parents and its local community. Standards are rising and achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results were above the national average in 2003; they rose by a large margin in 2004. The good quality of education broadens pupils' horizons very well. Pupils hold the school in high regard; they are very pleased with all it provides. Very good leadership by the head teacher and the senior leadership team instils the confidence to do well. Leadership and management are good. Good governance holds the school very closely to account. Matching the overall quality of provision with the below average cost of educating pupils, the school gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- GCSE results rose dramatically in 2004 to be the best in the school's history.
- Provision is excellent in art and very good in science, physical education, history and music.
- Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is unsatisfactory.
- Standards in modern foreign languages, ICT and mathematics have not improved in line with other subjects.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Spiritual, moral and social development and the care of pupils are very good.
- Provision in citizenship and work-related learning is unsatisfactory.
- Careers education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) provision is unsatisfactory.

The school has made a **good improvement** since the previous inspection, with sustained upward progress. Better training and checking on quality have improved teaching and learning. The now satisfactory co-ordination of design and technology is reflected in much better results. Provision for music is greatly improved. The use of ICT to reinforce learning is unsatisfactorily planned: achievement in mathematics, French and German, in particular, is undermined by inaccessibility to computers.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Overall achievement is good. Examination results over time show above average standards and an improving trend. The school's performance in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 is comparable to that of similar schools. Standards in GCSE examinations were above average in 2003 and improved significantly in 2004. However, results in mathematics and German are lower than would be expected. Standards in lessons are above average in Years 7 to 9 and well above average in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is excellent in art and very good in English, science, history, music and physical education, and good in all other subjects apart from mathematics, German and ICT, where it is satisfactory. Generally, girls achieve better than do boys, but the gap is closing. The progress of pupils with special education needs is satisfactory; it is limited by a scarcity of learning support assistants; however, rearranged provision is having a beneficial effect.

Performance compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11 GCSE examinations	B	B	B	C
Year 13 A/AS level and VCE examinations	C	C	D	

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

Pupils' personal development is **very good** as a result of **very good** provision for spiritual, moral and social education and **good** provision for cultural education. Relationships in the school are **very good**. Behaviour and attitudes are **good**; exclusion rates are low. Pupils' enthusiasm for their work, **good** attendance and sensible attitudes promote **good** learning and achievement.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. The school is very effective in catering for pupils' individual needs. The quality of teaching is **good**; it promotes **good** learning; teaching and learning are excellent in art and very good in history, music and physical education. The implementation of the national strategy for improving teaching is well established, but there is some unsatisfactory teaching in mathematics, ICT and German. There is also not enough extra help for a few pupils with learning difficulties. Assessment is **good**. Very careful checking of the pupils' progress in Years 10 and 11 and a very effective system of monitoring and mentoring raise achievement. Such systems lack enough rigour in Years 7 to 9.

The curriculum is **satisfactory**, with good vocational courses and continuity between phases. Science College status is helping to widen opportunities. Weaknesses in provision lie in teaching citizenship, personal, social and health education, careers and work-related learning. The use made of ICT is unsatisfactory in some subjects. Staffing, resources and accommodation are **satisfactory**. Extra-curricular provision is **good**.

The school has a **very effective** pastoral system. **Very good** care, individual support and guidance help personal development and academic achievement. The school has **very good** links with parents. It works **very well** with its local community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is well led and managed. The leadership of the head teacher and the senior leadership team is very good. A strong team of middle managers, who also show **good** leadership, ably support them. The governance of the school is **good**. Governors are fully involved in both strategic planning and the process of self-evaluation; they provide the school with a very high level of challenge, but they fail to carry out their legal responsibilities in suitable provision of citizenship, careers education and work-related learning. Financial planning is very good.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Relationships with parents are very good. Parents have great confidence in the work of the school. Parents receive very good information about their child's progress. Pupils enjoy being at the school. They value the high quality help from teachers and other staff; they find most lessons interesting and enjoyable.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are

- Raise standards in mathematics, ICT and German.
- Improve the use of ICT across the curriculum.
- Improve PSHE courses.

And meet statutory requirements by

- Improving provision for careers education, citizenship and work-related learning.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE BISHOPS' BLUE COAT SCHOOL CHURCH OF ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOL

The sixth form is of average size; there are 145 students on roll. The school provides a good range of GCE A-level, AS and vocational courses.

OVERALL EVALUATION

Overall provision in the sixth form is **satisfactory**. Very good leadership and management have led to substantial improvements in the quality of provision. Very careful financial management has ensured that the sixth form continues to be viable and is now cost effective. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is average. Students **achieve satisfactorily** as the result of **good** teaching. The **good** curriculum provides effectively for students with a wide range of prior attainment and provides **good** opportunities for enrichment. There has been **good** improvement since the previous inspection.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards require further improvement to match Year 11.
- Very good leadership has established a distinct ethos; improved teaching and learning have resulted in rapidly rising standards.
- Students receive very good individual guidance from subject and pastoral staff.
- Students respond well to good quality, challenging and demanding teaching.
- Inconsistent teaching in mathematics is a barrier to raising achievement.
- Arrangements for teaching key skills, especially ICT, require improvement.

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>Provision in English is good. Standards are average and as students enter the sixth form with standards that are below the national average this represents good achievement. Good teaching, together with good relationships, promotes good achievement.</p> <p>A lesson of German was sampled and teaching was found to be very good; in the French lessons sampled teaching was satisfactory in Year 12 and good in Year 13.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Provision in mathematics is satisfactory. Standards are average. Teaching is satisfactory, but of variable quality: where lessons are well planned and expectations are high learning is good but in some cases, where planning is poor, students do not cover enough work.</p>
Science	<p>Provision in chemistry is good. Standards are above average. Teaching is consistently good and this, combined with students' very positive attitudes, produces good achievement.</p> <p>A physics lesson was sampled and the teaching was found to be very good.</p>
Humanities	<p>Provision in geography is satisfactory. Standards have been below average but are rapidly improving. Good leadership and management are leading to much improved teaching and learning. Very good achievement was observed in AS-level classes.</p>

Visual and performing arts and media	A lesson of art was sampled. Teaching was very good and promoted very good achievement. A lesson of drama was sampled and teaching was found to be excellent .
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel.	A lesson of leisure and recreation was sampled and teaching was found to be good . A lesson of leisure and tourism was sampled and teaching was also good .
Business	Provision in business studies is satisfactory . Standards have been marginally below average, but they are improving. Achievement is now satisfactory as a result of good teaching combined with students' very positive attitudes.
Health and social care	Provision in health and social care is satisfactory . Standards have been poor but achievement is now satisfactory and standards are rising, although they are still below average. The course matches students' needs well but inconsistent teaching quality reduces achievement. Some individual achievement is good.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students receive **good** guidance that ensures they join appropriate courses. Arrangements for induction into the sixth form are very good. Close monitoring of academic and personal development deals quickly with underachievement. Careers advice and help for university applications have improved significantly.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Very good leadership and good management have brought about rapid improvements to the quality of provision. Effective teams have been established along with a good range of strategies and procedures to support students' academic and personal development. Effective monitoring of teaching quality is raising standards. Although a good start has been made, the use of external data and evaluation could be improved. Careful financial management has made a cost-effective sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy being in the sixth form. They appreciate the personal support they get from individual teachers and sixth form staff. However, they feel that the careers advice they receive in Year 11 could be improved. Students feel they are treated as adults and that their views are listened to and respected.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and national tests results are average compared with similar schools. Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results are above average compared with similar schools and they rose substantially in 2004, being the best in the school's history. Good improvements have been made in all subjects except mathematics, German and ICT; these have not kept up. GCE A-level results were too low in 2003, but they also rose substantially in 2004.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have improved substantially since the previous inspection and further rose dramatically in 2004: over three-quarters of the pupils obtained five or more higher grade passes, A*-C.
- Results in art, drama and statistics are outstanding and those in science, history, physical education and music are well above average.
- Achievement is good.
- Standards in mathematics, ICT and modern foreign languages have not kept up with the rest.
- Pupils' literacy skills improve well throughout the school.

Commentary

1. Standards are rising, especially in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, where the school has focused its main actions for improvement. The school's popularity and numbers on roll are going up; there is an increasing number of pupils from supportive families. The school equips its pupils well with academic qualifications for entry to continuing education, training or employment.
2. From about average starts as 11 year olds, pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9. The proportions reaching expected National Test Levels at the end of Year 9 were, from 1999 to 2003, uniformly above national averages in each of English, mathematics and science. With the three subjects taken together, average point scores were well above average for the age group in 2003. Girls did better than boys in each subject. In 2003, both girls and boys were further in front of their gender, compared with national averages, in English than in the other subjects.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.2 (34.4)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.0 (36.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	35.4 (36.2)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 175 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. In comparison with pupils in similar schools, the numbers reaching the expected Level 5 were average in English and below average in mathematics and science in 2003. The numbers reaching Levels 6 plus were well above average in English and science and average in mathematics. Pro rata, higher attainers do better than the rest. Inspection findings corroborate this: unsatisfactory teaching in mathematics reduces achievement. The school fell short of its Years 7 to 9 targets in each subject in 2003, but it was closer in 2004. Inspection suggests

there is scope to give extra attention to performance at this stage in order to expand the upward trend of Years 10 and 11.

4. Good teaching combined with a very effective monitoring and mentoring system and pupils' and teachers' commitment to producing high quality coursework results in pupils achieving very well in Years 10 and 11. Any underachievement is identified very early and rectified. GCSE results have risen substantially since the previous inspection. After a dip in 2003, results rose again very substantially in 2004: over three-quarters of the pupils obtained at least five higher grade passes, A*-C, the best in the school's history and the highest in the Chester area. The percentage obtaining five or more passes, A*-G, also rose and was well above previous national averages, showing some very good achievement on the part of numerous pupils with special educational needs. At this level, girls outperform boys, but boys have made good strides since the previous inspection; they are now consistently in front of boys nationally. The few pupils from ethnic minorities do very well.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	59 (65)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91 (96)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96(100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	36.3 (38.3)	34.7(34.8)

There were 157 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

5. In 2003 and in 2004, GCSE results exceeded by a long way predictions of pupils' capabilities when they began in Year 7 and also the school's agreed targets. Inspection evidence suggests this pattern will continue, though with a slight fall in prospect this year. Main reasons for the improvements are: better teaching and learning stemming from national and local initiatives; robust support programmes for pupils seen to be slipping; very good guidance that makes sure pupils are on the right course; and a relentless pursuit of standards from the invigorating school leadership. Increasingly close attention is paid to analysis of performance in which, for example, thorough checks on what subjects need to do to improve are paying dividends.
6. The GCSE result pattern is not uniform across subjects. Results in art, design and technology, English literature, history, home economics, physical education and religious education were all significantly above average in 2003. Results in geography and mathematics were below average and all other subjects were average.
7. The very substantial improvements in 2004 occurred in nearly all subjects. Results in art, drama, and statistics were outstanding, with over nine-tenths of pupils obtaining a higher grade, A*-C, pass. Improvements in science were very good, anticipating the school's successful application for specialist college status. Big improvements in geography results stem from renewed vigour and subject leadership. Results in German and mathematics, although at about the previous national averages, failed to keep up with the rest. Point scores that were average compared with similar schools in 2003 are likely to be in the top 5 per cent nationally in 2004. The already-published trend of improvement in GCSEs is above the national one and the 2004 results should only serve to reinforce the trend.
8. Pupils' literacy skills improve as they move through the school. They become adept at writing for a variety of purposes and they talk well about their studies, although there is scope in some subjects such as modern foreign languages, citizenship and PSHE to give them more

chances to talk about their work in class. Pupils' mathematical skills develop sufficiently to allow them to work out satisfactorily, for example, equations in science or graphical information in geography. Their competence in using ICT is unsatisfactory. ICT is used very well in art and music but some subjects, such as mathematics and modern foreign languages, fail to make enough use of ICT facilities.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in AS and A-level were low in 2003.
- Systems have only recently been put in place to monitor and support students and they are now beginning to become effective and raise levels of achievement.
- There was a big improvement in AS and A-level results in 2004 because new leadership is making a real difference; standards are rising.

Commentary

9. Recruitment to courses is satisfactory, though there are some small A-level classes that receive governors' approval in the pursuit of breadth of opportunity, but cause a drain on the budget. German and French classes, for example, are very small in Year 13. The students are achieving very well because well-devised teaching and their own personal ambitions help them sustain a high work rate.
10. Retention rates for the duration of each course to GNVQ, AS or A-level are also satisfactory, although students' achievements through the Year 12 courses were unsatisfactory in 2003. However, very strong new leadership, combined with improved teaching and careful monitoring of students' progress, has led to higher achievement. Substantial improvements in 2004 showed in a much-improved AS-level pass rate, the result of the closer attention to students' performances through the year. Progression to higher education was good in 2004.
11. GCE A-level results were below the national average in 2003. The average points score was below the national average and there was evidence of significant underachievement. Girls' achievement was worse than that of boys. There was no significant difference between the achievement of girls and boys in 2004, when average points scores and results also improved substantially. Although the quality of teaching has improved to good, achievement still lags behind because the much improved working atmosphere and systems of monitoring and checking on students' progress have not had time to impact fully. Achievement has been improving steadily over the past year, but standards are, as yet, no more than average.
12. Results in 2003 A-level and AS-level English language were broadly in line with the national average. As students enter the sixth form with standards that are below average, this represents good achievement. A-level mathematics results were close to the national average in 2003 and 2004. The intake for mathematics was average; achievement was satisfactory. Results in A-level chemistry were below the national average but improved in 2004; more students obtained the higher grades. Examination results in geography have been average in recent years; they improved in 2004.
13. Students need to develop their study skills during Years 12 and 13. Comparative weaknesses in ICT before they start their studies show very clearly in the sixth form. On occasion, spelling weaknesses let the quality of work down. Problems with numeracy mean, for example, that some students struggle with mathematical formulae in physics lessons; as a result, they find difficulty with the A-level course. Lack of maturity and experience of rigorous independent study inhibits achievement for a very small number of students, although the re-invigorated leadership is effectively redressing these failings.

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

Pupils' attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **good**. Exclusions are below average. Spiritual, moral and social development is **very good**; cultural development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships are very good; pupils have the confidence to ask challenging questions.
- Good attitudes combined with regular attendance contribute towards good achievement.
- Tutor times are used well to promote pupils' personal development.
- There is a very good range of visits and trips, locally and further afield, that successfully contributes to personal development.
- Preparation for life in a multi-cultural society is weak.

Commentary

14. Pupils are keen to attend school and most have good attendance records. The school's procedures for monitoring attendance are good and pupils with attendance problems are identified early. An effective working relationship between pastoral staff, the school inclusion team and external agencies, including the education welfare service, ensures that pupils with attendance issues are well supported.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.3	School data	0.1
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

15. Pupils have good attitudes in lessons and this promotes good achievement. Pupils work sensibly with good application; they concentrate and are well motivated. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers, whom they respect. However, they are prepared to challenge and ask questions to extend their knowledge and understanding. A small number of pupils, usually but not exclusively boys, can be lively, especially after lunch. Behaviour is usually very well controlled in a firm but friendly manner. Occasionally, unsatisfactory teaching results in bored, restless, and difficult to manage pupils.
16. Behaviour when pupils are unsupervised is good. Most pupils have good self-control and there is a calm atmosphere around school. However, a small number of boys indulge in more boisterous behaviour. Pupils report that they are happy in school and that bullying and racism are rare. They say that when bullying does occur teachers quickly nip it in the bud. Relationships are very good. This gives pupils the confidence to ask questions and to speak out and offer an opinion, and promotes good learning. Behaviour on formal occasions, such as assemblies, is very good.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1006	48	2
White – any other White background	8		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1		
Mixed – White and Asian	1		
Mixed – any other mixed background	5		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	4		
Black or Black British – African	1		
Chinese	1		
No ethnic group recorded	6		

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

17. Spiritual development is very good. Pupils are able to develop a set of values that inform their perspective on life. There is a strong commitment to an understanding of the intangible and very good opportunities for creative growth in lessons such as art, drama and music. The school meets statutory requirements for a daily collective act of worship. There are regular year group assemblies, and very effective guidance from senior management ensures that tutor time is well used for prayer and reflection and makes an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.
18. Moral development is very strong. Pupils are provided with a very clear Christian moral code to which they respond well. Teachers and senior members of staff lead by example and treat pupils with dignity and respect. Pupils are keen to take responsibility for their own actions and there is a strong commitment to fund raising. They enjoy active involvement with pupils from a local special school. Pupils are able to develop empathy and understanding while extending their own social skills.
19. Social development is very good. Good development of teaching and learning styles has resulted in many opportunities for group work and paired work, which extends pupils' social skills and, as a result, pupils co-operate and collaborate well. These opportunities are further extended by involvement in a number of clubs and initiatives such as Greenwatch, an environmental group, and Year 10 assistants. An October residential trip for Year 7 pupils further promotes opportunities for their personal and social development. A very positive feature of this residential is the attendance by most teaching and non-teaching staff, together with the Year 10 'assistants' in support of this invaluable pastoral and team-building event.
20. Cultural development is good and many wonderful visits are arranged that extend pupils' cultural awareness. More diverse cultures are explored in music, art and geography but extending pupils' understanding of cultural diversity is not a strong enough feature of the school's provision.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students benefit from the school's very good provision for personal development.
- Students make a good contribution to the school community.
- Some students fail to take their studies seriously enough to make the progress of which they are capable.

Commentary

21. Students have good attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form. Most work hard and profit from the opportunities available; these, together with satisfactory attendance, help them to achieve well in lessons. However, there are times when some students, particularly boys, are happy to operate at a low level and let time slip by without exertion. The school is aware that some students can sometimes lack independence, maturity and the ability to organise themselves well. Steps are taken to address this early by introducing a study skills programme into Year 11. Students are very loyal and speak well of their school. Students respond well to wider responsibility and provide valuable help in the school and in the wider community. Relationships are very good and are enhanced by the popular residential visit to Bangor University.
22. Improvements in the structure of the sixth form and to the personal, social and health education programme, together with some good opportunities in lessons for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, result in very good personal development.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is **good** in the main school and **satisfactory** in the sixth form. Effective teaching leads to good learning. Pupils and students receive **very good** care, **good** support, and **satisfactory** guidance. The school curriculum is **satisfactory**; it is reasonably balanced, but there are gaps.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **good** in the main school and in the sixth form. The quality of assessment is **good**, although long-term assessment is better than day-to-day marking.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know their subjects very well; they plan lessons carefully and engage pupils' and students' interest well. Some excellent teaching is an inspiration to pupils.
- Pupils and students have good attitudes to learning.
- Work is well matched to individual needs in most, but not all, lessons.
- There is a small but significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching.
- ICT is underused to extend and support learning.
- Special educational needs provision lacks precision and organisation.
- Homework setting is inconsistent and some marking gives too little guidance on how to improve.

Commentary

23. Reflecting the views of their parents, most pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaires consider that teaching and learning are good. Inspectors agree; there are big improvements since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent

in art, and very good in physical education, music, science and history in Years 10 and 11. It is good in English, design and technology, geography, history and science in Years 7 to 9, and also good in the ICT examination course and in German in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in mathematics and in both modern foreign languages in Years 7 to 9.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 139 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (4%)	36 (26%)	60 (43%)	31 (22%)	6 (4%)	1 (1%)	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.

24. The school's teaching and learning group and professional tutor have been instrumental in successfully encouraging different methods of teaching, taking into account a better understanding of pupils' preferred learning styles. The implementation of the national strategy for pupils in Years 7 to 9 has brought about a much more systematic approach to sharing what the lesson is about with the pupils at its start and a summary of learning at the end of each lesson. However, some inconsistencies remain and best practice is not yet general.
25. Good teaching is based firmly on teachers' clear and secure understanding of their subjects, and of the National Curriculum. The qualities of very good and better teaching are characterised by enthusiasm, very clear explanations of difficult ideas and excellent demonstrations, which target pupils' different learning styles. Good use of assessment information helps to match work very closely to the needs of the pupils, inspiring them to be creative, to expand their horizons and to build their self-belief to higher levels.
26. Very good learning follows carefully planned work that provides interesting, challenging activities in which pupils readily engage; this is universal in art and frequent in several other subjects. Pupils learn particularly well when they are fully aware of how well they are doing and how the work fits into the examining system for which they are preparing. In science, for example, they work very well individually, in pairs or in groups, as they try to reach clear targets set for them. Very good relationships create a purposeful working atmosphere.
27. Teachers' personal commitment to providing the best for all pupils is clearly apparent. Teachers sustain the interests of boys as well as girls by careful timing that sustains the pace of work. They ask well-considered questions to help pupils to develop their thinking, and to test and secure their learning. Most set regular homework, but analyses of pupils' planners, scrutiny of previous work and discussions with pupils show there is some inconsistency in both the setting and informative marking of homework.
28. The school checks regularly and increasingly rigorously on teaching quality; it has taken effective action to promote and encourage best practice and has gone a long way to tackling weaknesses. There is scope for further work. Where teaching and learning are less effective, as for example in some mathematics lessons, pace is too slow and the work set is not really relevant to the pupils who, as a result, are insufficiently involved.
29. Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is now satisfactory. New appointments are improving matters.
30. Teachers make good use of traditional learning resources, but the effective use of ICT is underdeveloped. The school is well equipped with up-to-date ICT hardware, but this equipment is underused as a means of helping learning in some subjects, significantly mathematics, German and French, the ones in which results have risen less than in others.

31. Many teachers give generously of their time outside of lessons to provide extra teaching and to help pupils, particularly those in examination groups. Those who are in danger of missing a higher grade are identified and given very close attention. The effects of such extra help are clear in the improved GCSE examination results. The impact of this added help was lesser in German, as the selection lacked the necessary rigour and persuasion of the benefits that would accrue.
32. Assessment procedures are systematic and effective in Years 10 and 11, and that model is being extended to Years 7, 8 and 9. Information is used well to set challenging yet achievable targets and to provide support for learning in a variety of ways. Detailed tracking of pupils' progress lets help be directed to an individual pupil's specific needs; this is good practice. Over 50 staff, not all of them teachers, are deployed as learning mentors, and the school is a member of the National Mentoring Network; standards have risen as a result of their work. The excellent and very good teaching seen during the inspection used meticulously very detailed assessment information to make sure that work was pitched at exactly the right level. This very good practice was underpinned by relentless demands for pupils to evaluate their own work, and to strive for the highest possible quality. Such detail leads to very good achievement in Years 10 and 11.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- A rigorous system of checking on how students are learning is raising standards to what they should be.

Commentary

33. An analysis of lessons inspected in the sixth form shows teaching and learning to be good. Teachers are expert in their subject and plan their teaching well. They provide their students with a clear learning path. The most effective teaching encourages students to develop a more self-reliant and independent approach to their learning. Recent improvement, reflected in the 2004 results, suggests teaching is exercising a greater influence on learning than before. It is now systematically supported by a robust system for monitoring and evaluating students' learning; achievement is coming closer to where it should be. Although some students lack confidence in their learning, they all adopt a positive attitude to their study.
34. Students, when questioned, were almost unanimous that teaching was challenging and demanding, and they valued in particular the commitment their teachers showed in giving time and help beyond the normal school day.
35. Assessment in the sixth form is good. Students' work is marked well, and they are given clear verbal indications in lessons of the progress they are making. Detailed records are kept which monitor and track academic performance and which form the basis for regular termly reviews where targets for improvement are set or refined.

The curriculum

Curricular provision is **satisfactory**, in the sixth form it is **good**. Opportunities for enrichment are **good**. Staffing, accommodation and resources are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for pupils and students aged from 14 to 19 years is developing well.
- Good opportunities for curriculum enrichment and provision for learning outside the school day promote personal development and academic achievement.
- The match of teaching staff to the curriculum is good.
- Provision for careers education and citizenship, including work-related learning, lacks balance; it does not meet statutory requirements.
- The content and planning of personal, social and health education are unsatisfactory.
- The library plays a very good part in helping pupils to achieve well.

Commentary

36. The curriculum meets statutory requirements for all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education well, except in the provision of careers and citizenship with work-related learning, which is unsatisfactory. The curriculum is designed to cater equally for all pupils, but weak timetabling has led to occasional inequalities with some classes being too large to guarantee effective learning for all pupils. Issues identified at the previous inspection have been successfully resolved in music and design and technology. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive their ICT entitlement through subject lessons, but the quality of this provision is inadequately checked upon.
37. Curriculum innovation and suitably monitored and evaluated implementation are distinctive features of the changing school provision. The curriculum now reflects successfully the needs of the pupils as they continue their education or move into training and employment. An evolving comprehensive 14-19 curriculum is helped by very close links with further and higher education and the community. This impetus is moving ahead quickly through curriculum changes in response to the school's recent accreditation as a designated Science College.
38. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum has been improved recently by the introduction of GNVQ courses in health and social care and ICT linked to short GCSE language courses. The provision for business education is not yet fully developed. Strong links with the local college of further education mean that a wide range of nationally recognised and assessed vocational courses is available to pupils and students aged from 14 to 19. Careers advice and guidance are weaker than reported at the previous inspection and are now unsatisfactory. Whilst pupils in Year 8 are involved in work shadowing and pupils in Year 10 have a two-week work experience, coherence in provision for work-related learning is unsatisfactory, as is support for pupils' passage into further education or employment.
39. Recently, the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 has benefited from the introduction of the ideas and methods within the National Strategy. Improved teaching, learning and the use of assessment data are raising achievement, not least that of higher attainers, including the gifted and talented. Whilst school policies for improving literacy and numeracy have been largely successful, the impact has been variable with some inconsistencies between and within departments. The use of ICT, further to improve teaching and learning in subjects, is strengthening, but inadequate access to computers still undermines achievement in mathematics, German, French and design and technology.
40. The provision for personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory because too much emphasis is placed on careers education at the expense of adequate coverage of sex and health education, drugs awareness, citizenship and personal education. Other subjects, such as science, make a good contribution to health education and that together with the use of outside speakers ensures that sex and drugs education meet statutory requirements, but the other aspects do not.

41. The quality and range of extra-curricular provision, enrichment activities and support for learning outside the school day are good. Provision and participation in sport, art and music and many other activities remain strengths, as reported at the previous inspection. The physical education department provides an extensive range of inter-school and inter-form competitive activities in many sports. Delayed bus times on one evening each week allow for many pupils to engage in extra-curricular activities or to use the school facilities for independent learning. In spite of short lunch breaks, most departments provide well for subject-specific clubs or special interest activities. A wide range of educational visits, foreign exchanges and links with other schools overseas contributes well to enriching pupils' experiences.
42. The curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. New management is quickly bringing about substantial improvements. Targets in individual education plans are known to teachers but are not always used when planning lessons. In most lessons where they are provided, learning assistants are effectively deployed. However, learning support assistance does not adequately meet the needs of those pupils for whom learning is difficult. Pupils' progress is now being carefully monitored on a weekly and lesson-by-lesson basis.
43. The match of suitably qualified teachers to the curriculum is good. There is good provision for technical and administrative assistance. Resources for teaching and learning are satisfactory; materials and equipment meet pupils' needs. The library is a very good, well-used facility for research and independent learning; it helps pupils to learn by themselves or under guidance from teachers and other staff. Accommodation is satisfactory. In some subjects, for example science, accommodation is very good, but provision for special educational needs and business education is inadequate.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improved provision meets the learning needs of a widening range of students well.
- Collaboration with schools nearby widens learning opportunities well.
- Provision for teaching key skills is weak.

Commentary

44. Curriculum provision is good. The curriculum offered provides students with a wide range of courses. Recently more vocationally orientated courses have been introduced. The courses provided meet the students' needs and enable them to achieve well. A great deal of effort is made to let students study the subjects of their choice. Choice is extended by the opportunity to study some minority subjects at other local sixth forms and to study psychology through distance learning.
45. Students entering the sixth form usually have average literacy and numeracy skills but their ICT skills are weaker. Most have the skills necessary to cope with the courses they follow but suffer from the lack of a coherent key skills programme. Provision for PSHE is improving rapidly and students are now being appropriately prepared for life after school. There are very good opportunities for students to be involved in the school and the wider community, and this contributes to their personal development.
46. Arrangements for work experience are appropriate. Careers education is improving and is satisfactory at this stage. Students are offered good individual support by staff and external

agencies. Arrangements for work-related education, including an enterprise culture, require improvement.

Care, guidance and support

The school promotes and delivers pupils' and students' care, welfare, health and safety **very well**. It provides them with **good** support, advice and guidance and involves them **very effectively** in the work and development of their school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pastoral support, advice and guidance are very good and promote good achievement.
- Induction arrangements for pupils and students are very good and help them settle in quickly.
- Relationships between pupils, students and all staff are very good.
- The involvement of pupils and students in the running of their school is very good; it gives them a sense of ownership and pride in their school.
- Careers advice to pupils in Year 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

47. The pastoral support systems are very good. The very close relationships between all staff in school ensure there is an ethos in which pupils are valued and supported very well. Pupils feel safe and able to work free of bullying and other forms of anti-social behaviour. The school is a safe, secure environment in which pupils can learn effectively. As pupils progress through school, their personal and academic progress is efficiently recorded and monitored. Appropriate intervention, which includes the very good use of external mentors, is applied for those experiencing difficulties or who require extra support with their learning, so helping such pupils to make very good progress in Years 10 and 11.
48. Pupils with special educational needs are supported as a result of the good inclusive ethos of the school. The effective communication process involving form and subject tutors, heads of year, and heads of key stages, ensure information relating to pupils' personal and academic progress is routinely exchanged, recorded and monitored. Statutory requirements, including child protection procedures, are effective.
49. Parents comment positively about the arrangements for the induction of their children into the school. The induction arrangements for Year 7 pupils are very good. The arrangements for their 'first day' as the only pupils in school, supported by Year 10 assistants, ensure they can settle quickly and easily into the school's routines. Pupils value this arrangement as it quickly and effectively removes any pre-conceived ideas they may have formed about how they will be treated by the older pupils in school. Later, Year 10 classroom assistants provide a 'friendly face' and act as mentors during registration periods and throughout the school day. These very good arrangements have a positive impact, enabling the youngest pupils in school to get on with their learning. Bullying is not a feature of this school. Pupils are confident any incidents will be quickly and effectively dealt with.
50. The newly formed school council provides all pupils with a say in the running and organisation of their school. Enthusiastically led by the deputy head teacher, the council is growing in confidence and has been directly responsible for the development of the pupil planner. This very well designed, popular and effective booklet ensures pupils can access their timetable, record their homework, and have recorded their behaviour, efforts and attitudes to their work, which are read by their form tutors, parents and carers.

51. Pupils deemed to be at risk of 'dropping out', or significantly underachieving, receive good advice and guidance through the very effective intervention of the school inclusion team and from enthusiastic and dedicated members of the Connexions team.
52. Careers advice, particularly in Years 10 and 11, is unsatisfactory. It is limited by the inability of all appropriate members of staff involved in careers advice, inclusion and the Connexions team to meet routinely to exchange information.
53. Parents warmly acknowledge that the school is a welcoming and pleasant centre for learning.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Induction arrangements to the sixth form are very good.
- Students can make informed decisions about their future courses.

Commentary

54. Students in the sixth form receive good guidance and support from their tutors, information about UCAS and specific guidance for those seeking entry into Oxbridge or medical school. As a result, students are able to make informed decisions about the type of courses they wish to undertake, the progress they are making, and later, the universities they intend applying to. However, this good advice is rightly perceived by students as insufficient during their earlier periods in Year 10 and 11. Students are unanimous in praise of their tutors, and value their advice and guidance immensely. They also appreciate the ways consultation with them is improving.
55. The arrangements for the induction of students into Year 12 are very good. Individual guidance interviews ensure students undertake suitable and appropriate courses of study. Close monitoring of their academic and personal development enables tutors to identify any underachievement quickly. Improved use of attainment data is raising achievement.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents, the community and with other schools, colleges and universities are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Information to parents about their children's progress is very good.
- Newsletters, weekly surgeries by the head teacher and governors' reports are very good methods of helpful communication with parents.
- The school's involvement with partner primary schools, colleges and universities to extend pupils' personal, social and cultural development is very good.
- Links with the immediate and wider community are very good.
- The church provides a strong contribution to pupils' personal development.

Commentary

56. Information included in the pupil and student reports is very good. It enables parents to have detailed information about their children's work, the progress they are making and the steps they need to take in order to achieve expected targets. Parents of Year 7 pupils are very pleased with the arrangements for the transfer of their children into school. The pupil planners are an effective means by which parents gain an insight into their children's work, their

attitudes and their efforts during their studies. They provide a useful and effective means of two-way communication between home and school.

57. The governors' annual report is very informative and very well presented; it meets statutory requirements with the exception of a statement relating to special educational needs. The school's newsletter is particularly attractive and informative. It gives a thorough insight into the life of the school and pupil and student achievement. The head teacher's weekly surgery enables parents to discuss matters that are of concern to them, which has a positive impact upon home-school relationships. Inspection evidence fully supports the very positive views of parents.
58. Collaborative work with pupils from the local special school provides pupils in Year 9 with the opportunity to improve their German linguistic skills, social development and curriculum work in drama, art and design. The school makes very good use of outside agencies such as Connexions in support of pupils' personal development. The Youth Achievement Awards for example, provides pupils in Year 10 with the opportunity to enhance their personal, social, cultural and moral development. The school makes very good use of visits and residential stays at colleges and universities to improve teaching and learning for Year 10 and 11 pupils, and to provide a 'taster' of what they will experience when entering further and higher education. Primary schools and the immediate community make good use of the school's library in support of life-long learning. Work placements for Year 10 pupils are very well organised. Visits made by staff ensure that all pupils are able to gain purposeful work experience in a safe and secure environment. Very strong business links provide many beneficial opportunities to enhance and enrich pupils' learning opportunities. One such partnership has directly resulted in a substantial contribution of funds in support of curriculum development and the school's successful bid to become a Science College. The school's involvement with a local Beacon school enriches the curriculum work in history.
59. The school chaplain provides a strong, supportive role in support of pupils' personal, moral and spiritual development. Strong links with the Diocese, and events held in the Cathedral and local churches enrich pupils' personal, social and spiritual development very well.
60. The High School Association works tirelessly to help the school. The recent purchase of the new school minibus is testament to the significant contribution it makes to extend pupils' extra-curricular activities and social, moral and personal development.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students play an important part in the work the school does with other schools.

Commentary

61. The very good links with partner primary schools provide students with the opportunity to enhance and enrich the curriculum for Year 5 and 6 pupils in subjects such as mathematics, science and modern foreign languages in particular. It enhances these pupils' learning and linguistic skills, and improves their learning opportunities for when they transfer into the high school. Student exchanges provide opportunities to experience life in other countries and to extend students' personal, social and cultural development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Governance of the school is **good**. The quality of leadership provided by the head teacher, senior team and other staff with responsibilities is **good**. Management is **effective**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governing body provides a good level of challenge, but there are breaches in the required statutory provision.
- The head teacher and other key staff have clarity of vision and a drive for improvement that is working.
- A strong commitment to inclusion reflects the school's Christian values.
- Very good staff training is improving teaching quality and examination results.
- The school achieves its financial priorities by very careful financial management.
- There is under-provision in the help available to pupils with special educational needs.

Commentary

62. The governing body has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It collaborates well with the senior leadership team and provides a good level of challenge. Governors hold the school firmly to account for standards and the quality of education provided. They have very active involvement in the school's self-evaluation and strategic planning. Their determination and commitment help to drive the school forward. However, there are some important statutory requirements that are not met: the National Curriculum for citizenship is not fully covered and there is insufficient careers education for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
63. Clear strategic planning and very good leadership on the part of the senior team have resulted in exceptional improvements to GCSE examination results in 2004 and a rapidly improving sixth form provision. Such leadership is dedicated to raising standards within a Christian environment where the needs of each individual are carefully considered. Leadership is honest and self-critical; it is fully dedicated to the future of the school as a high achieving Science College.
64. Many of the senior managers and middle managers lead by example and bring about significant change. For example, sterling work has been done to achieve the Science College status. Careful monitoring of teaching quality, together with very good staff training, has improved the quality of teaching and has resulted in much improved GCSE examination results in 2004. The leadership of departments is good, but there are weaknesses. In mathematics and languages where improvements lagged behind, leadership, in the one case, has failed to galvanise a team commonly dedicated to raising standards, and in the other, fails to make sure that pupils who need extra help get it. Substantial staff training has not yet resulted in the desired improvements in mathematics; there is still some unsatisfactory teaching.
65. The school is organised and managed efficiently. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. The use of performance data has strengths, but it requires improvement in departments. Target setting and the monitoring of achievement are well established in Years 10 and 11 and make an important contribution to the high standards achieved at the end of Year 11. Target setting, the use of external information and the monitoring of achievement lack some rigour in Years 7 to 9.
66. There is very good commitment to effective professional development of staff and the arrangements for the support of student teachers and graduate trainees are very good. These very good arrangements are reflected in consistently good quality teaching and improving examination results, except in mathematics and modern foreign languages.
67. The school has started to relieve teaching staff of many administrative tasks and to address workforce reform. Timetable arrangements have not always resulted in the best deployment of staff.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	2980359
Total expenditure	2960322
Expenditure per pupil	2888

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	-14682
Balance carried forward to the next	5355

68. Finances are managed very effectively and this was reflected in the most recent auditor's report. The school acted quickly on the relatively minor recommendations. Systems for financial administration are unobtrusive and the head teacher and governors are informed well on financial matters. The principles of best value are well understood and practised. Setting the below average cost of educating each pupil against standards that are at least well above average and a good quality of education, the school provides good value for money.
69. The school benefits from a supportive team of school administrators, technical staff, caterers, lunchtime supervisors, maintenance staff and cleaning staff who undertake a range of duties essential to the smooth running of the school. They have a very positive impact upon the lives of all pupils, students, staff and visitors to the school.
70. Insufficient use of ICT and insufficient support for pupils with special educational needs are barriers to learning.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Exercising clear leadership, the governors have taken successful steps to improve sixth form provision.
- The sixth form is very well led through effective teams.

Commentary

71. Leadership and management in the sixth form are very good. Rapid improvements have been made to provision, which is now satisfactory, and this is reflected in improving examination results. Senior leaders in the sixth form have worked very well in partnership with governors, the school's senior leadership team, teachers and students to establish a distinctive sixth form ethos and to develop a range of strategies and procedures that successfully supports students' learning. Effective teams have been set up and leaders provide very good role models for students and staff. Collaborative arrangements with partner schools have broadened provision that now meets the needs of a wider range of students.
72. Quality assurance is improving and effective monitoring of teaching has resulted in higher standards. The school is starting to use data effectively to analyse its performance, but the use of external data requires improvement. Sixth form students are good role models for younger pupils and contribute very well to the life of the school. Although the sixth form has been barely cost effective, very careful financial management has ensured that it continues to be viable; it now provides satisfactory value for money.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

The effectiveness of work-related learning

Work related learning is **unsatisfactory**.

73. The school makes good provision for vocational courses for the 14 to 19 year olds who choose them. Forward planning for vocational education in the Science College bid is strong. However, careers education for all pupils taught through personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory so that basic preparation for work and extended education has significant weaknesses. The 14-16 curriculum lacks an enterprise dimension for all students. The development of ICT skills, basic to many jobs, is not monitored or assessed across the curriculum for the majority who do not follow an ICT course up to the end of Year 11.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations in Year 11 are above average.
- Achievement is good because of the good overall quality of teaching.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good.
- The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Assessment and marking do not make enough impact on pupils' progress.

Commentary

74. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average. Results in the Year 9 national tests have been above average in the last four years and better than those in mathematics overall. 2003 results were well above average, showing good achievement from the start of Year 7. Girls do better than boys, following a national pattern. Pupils listen well and speak with a good awareness of audience. Speaking and listening standards are above average. Pupils speak clearly with a good sense of audience. Their skills in analytical reading and writing and in imaginative writing are strengths.
75. Standards are well above average in Year 11. Confidence in speaking increases and imaginative writing continues to be of a high standard. Pupils write legibly in fluent cursive hands, but punctuation and paragraphing skills are underdeveloped. However, good overall standards and achievement enable nearly all pupils to gain creditable GCSEs in both language and literature.
76. GCSE results of the end of Year 11 are generally above average. 2003 results for GCSE English language were average and well above average for English literature and pupils achieved satisfactorily. 2004 figures indicate above average standards, continuing improvement in A*-C higher grade passes and very good achievement by this group of pupils from their average standards at the beginning of Year 7. Girls are achieving better than boys, as nationally, but this gap is narrowing because teachers, using the national strategy, are making lessons more active and keeping the boys' interest.
77. The good quality of teaching caters well for the wide range of pupils' capabilities and backgrounds and promotes good learning. Arrangements to teach pupils in bands of ability work well. High expectations in these groups encourage slower and faster learners. Very good relationships and command of the subject enable teachers to address individual needs promptly and effectively. Pupils for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs make good progress as a result. Teachers start lessons strongly and consistently give classes very good examples of expressive and enthusiastic speech, reading and writing, which pupils absorb. Careful planning links all three in challenging learning activities in nearly all lessons. Sensitive teaching elicits equal contributions from boys and girls.

78. However, the quality of teaching varies from very good to satisfactory. Pupils' yearly progress therefore varies accordingly. The few less effective lessons lack pace and engagement and do not ask enough of pupils. Occasional inappropriate behaviour wastes time and delays progress. In many lessons, there is some loss of impetus as pupils change from learning to practising new skills.
79. Assessment is satisfactory, but does not make enough impact on achievement because pupils are not sufficiently involved. They know their standards, and have general notions of how to improve, but do not get enough opportunities to gauge and record their progress towards specific targets and so to take responsibility for their learning. Marking quality varies as much as teaching. Some marking is very rigorous and is very effective in telling pupils how to improve, but some marking has less depth and does not usually bring enough improvement in standards.
80. Pupils enjoy nearly all lessons and behave well. They are willing learners, listening very well and showing readiness to respond and volunteer. They complete homework responsibly and work well in pairs and groups in class. The good overall quality of their attitudes and behaviour is a key factor in their good achievement.
81. Pupils are also well motivated because of the variety, challenge and interest of a good quality curriculum, which contributes well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Media studies work is well planned and taught, giving pupils good opportunities to understand, through investigation and imitation, the power of language. Drama lessons develop social and speaking skills very well in Years 7 to 9, but pupils in Years 10 and 11 enjoy fewer opportunities for this work. Many units of work develop pupils' understanding of moral and social issues.
82. Leadership and management are good. Lessons and pupils' progress are monitored effectively, giving an accurate view of priorities for development. There has been good progress on issues from the previous inspection. A skilled and experienced departmental team is well deployed and has made a good improvement in teaching, standards and achievement. However, staff do not have enough opportunities to share good practice to improve the consistency of provision.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

83. Provision and support to develop language and literacy skills in other subjects are good. Last year's thorough audit revealed good use of writing and learning of key vocabulary. There is very good practice in science and history. Other subjects making important contributions are art and design and geography. Full use of speech in learning across the curriculum is the key area for improvement.
84. **Drama** was sampled. Pupils showed above average skills in the Year 9 lesson seen. This was because the expertise, rigour and challenge of the teaching stimulated high levels of concentration and teamwork in improvisation. Insufficient demand prevented the school running GCSE drama in Year 11– a matter of justifiable concern to pupils, parents and drama staff. The drama studio provides very good quality accommodation for teaching and performance.

Modern foreign languages

French and German were the focus of the inspection.

Provision in French and German is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- German GCSE results have not kept pace with the improvements in nearly all other subjects in the school; they are unsatisfactory.
- Teaching is now good in German in Years 10 and 11 and it is helping pupils to achieve well.
- High attaining pupils achieve well; their attitudes are positive and they want to do well.
- Teaching does not always cater for groups of differing ability in lessons, so middle and especially low attainers often do not achieve as well as they could.
- Leadership is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

85. Since the previous inspection, improvements in examination results have not kept up with the rest of the school. Full course GCSE German (the first foreign language) results are at about the national average; compared with other subjects they are not good enough. The results in the German GCSE short course are poor. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average and achievement is satisfactory. Overall standards of work seen by Year 11 are above average. Achievement remains satisfactory, as most of the pupils studying French and German started the course with above average standards in Year 9.
86. More girls than boys complete the five-year full course and girls do much better. Some teaching does not provide the variety of learning experiences from which boys appear to benefit; this is especially so in Years 7 to 9, after which about one-third of pupils discontinues languages' study. Very few pupils with special educational needs are found in Years 10 and 11 classes, as many fail to make enough progress in Years 7 to 9. The few pupils from ethnic minorities achieve highly. Higher attainers talk engagingly, for example of holiday experiences, using complex constructions. They can write lengthy, accurate pieces. Unfinished written and inaccurate oral work typify the output of many lower attainers in Years 7 to 9.
87. French results are above average but are also falling, mainly because recently introduced free choice has widened the attainment range joining the course. However, pupils benefit from satisfactory teaching and achieve satisfactorily in French considering the short amount of study time they receive.
88. Real green shoots are producing clear improvements; inspection evidence suggests a considerably higher GCSE German result pattern next year. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The school places great emphasis on teaching and learning and newer teachers and the application of the national strategy have brought added quality and enterprising innovations, such as appealing lesson starter games, which are universally applied. Teaching and learning are good in German in Years 10 and 11. High attainers achieve well because they are able to work individually, in pairs and groups, on imaginative activities that challenge them consistently, with strict time limits set to keep up the pace. Lower attainers learn satisfactorily because the teaching keeps their interest through painstaking explanations and enjoyable games that help them to remember the work.
89. The best lessons are rounded off with good recapitulations on what has been learned. However, this is not the rule and numerous French and German lessons in Year 7 to 9 are brought to fairly abrupt ends that fail to give teacher or pupils an idea of how successful learning has been. Quite often, this is when the teacher has talked at too great a length and has not taken the needs of differing abilities in the class sufficiently into consideration, for instance presenting far too much new material all at once. As a result, numerous pupils, particularly boys, lose interest. Learning activities based on music, verse, competition and drama are under-exploited. A further weakness is the under-use of ICT to help pupils to learn.

90. Assessment is satisfactory. A new marking scheme has improved communication with pupils and parents, but is of too recent introduction to say how well it works. Targets, agreed at the start and checked at the end of each year, set up a good dialogue; this is an example of good practice in self-assessment. Assessments that involve pupils in the evaluation of how their peers have done are weak.
91. Management of the department is good, but leadership is unsatisfactory, as it has not overseen a sustained improvement in standards. There is a positive working relationship but self-review has not yet served to improve performance. There has been some improvement since the previous inspection but it has been inconsistent and this is unsatisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The standard of teaching across the department is variable, with some very good teaching and a few unsatisfactory lessons.
- Despite valiant efforts, best practice has not been effectively spread through the department.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes, generated by very strong teacher-pupil relationships.
- The management of the department is good, with thorough and clear documentation.
- There is insufficient use of computers.

Commentary

92. In 2003 the examination results at the end of Year 9 were above the national average, although they were in line with those of similar schools based on free school meals. The GCSE examination results at the end of Year 11 in 2003 were below average. In both cases the difference between the performance of boys and girls was not significant. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average so these results represented good achievement at the end of Year 9 and unsatisfactory achievement at the end of Year 11. The GCSE examinations showed that middle attaining pupils were the ones who achieved the worst, with a noticeable dip in the number of C grades obtained.
93. In 2004 the results at the end of Year 9 were in line with the 2003 results. The GCSE examination results at the end of Year 11 showed a considerable improvement over the 2003 results, although they were not as high as the GCSE results obtained in English and in science. Again, differences in performance between boys and girls are not significant. The achievement of pupils in the 2004 examinations and of those observed during the inspection is satisfactory.
94. Work seen during the inspection shows that attainment is average, both at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. By the end of Year 9 most pupils are able to understand graphs, Pythagoras, inequalities, areas and measurements. The highest achievers confidently manipulate algebraic formulae and understand cumulative frequency and simultaneous equations. Coursework for GCSE is of a high quality with confident use of algebra. Classes are set according to attainment and these arrangements allow pupils to make satisfactory progress in all aspects of the subject. There is no obvious difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in some lessons by effective learning support assistants. Talented pupils have a range of extra-curricular activities to support them as well as the opportunity to study GCSE statistics in Years 10 and 11. The achievement of such pupils is satisfactory.

95. Teaching and learning across the department in all years are of variable quality but satisfactory overall. Most lessons are well planned and very well organised with high expectation of pupils and very strong teacher-pupil relationships that encourage pupils to work hard. Here, the hour-long lesson time is well used, especially where the lesson is split into three parts with effective numeracy starters. In such lessons all pupils are challenged and engaged by effective question and answer sessions. Pupils' commitment to work is strong and their learning is good. However, there are too many lessons that lack challenge. In these lessons there is a lack of pace and a lack of structure. Here, pupils lose motivation and become disengaged, leading to inadequate progress and insufficient learning. For example, in a top set Year 11 lesson on finding areas of sectors of circles the task of deducing an appropriate method for the task was laboriously explained and written on the board. This reduced the lesson to the banal task of substituting numbers into a simple formula; as a result high attaining pupils were neither stretched nor stimulated.
96. The management of the department is good – there is thorough and well-written documentation. The schemes of work are clear and accessible. Procedures for the assessment of pupils are good and lead to effective setting of groups. There is good use made of self-evaluation, including perceptive analysis of examination data. Resources, in the form of modern textbooks, are of good quality and are well used. The leadership of the department is satisfactory. Long-term planning shows that the head of department has a clear vision of how to improve, has high aspirations and is determined to move the department forward. However, presently the department is not working as cohesively as it might and there is an urgent need to continue efforts to spread best practice more effectively amongst all teachers so that the overall standard of teaching can be improved.
97. The mathematics department effectively uses computers to enhance the subject when it can. However, a lack of access to computer facilities means that there is insufficient ICT work being done.
98. Since the previous inspection report in 1999 the GCSE examination results have fluctuated. However, the results have improved since their dip in 2003. Also, new management is working hard to drive up standards. The overall improvement in the subject is satisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

99. Mathematics is used well across the curriculum and pupils' standards in numeracy are good in Years 7 to 11. In science lessons pupils are able to use and understand complex units of measurements such as Newtons. Pupils' graphical skills are good and this promotes good achievement in GCSE science and geography. Pupils use numbers well in geography lessons to express scale; they understand co-ordinates, and can rank numbers and manipulate data.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are achieving very well because of very good teaching.
- Excellent leadership is improving provision and has helped the school gain Science College status.
- The National Strategy for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is used very well and has improved teaching and learning.
- Insufficient classroom support for lower attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 means that they do not make as much progress as is possible.

Commentary

100. In national tests at the end of Year 9, results are above average when compared with all schools and close to the average of those schools with a similar background. Results since the previous inspection have been at least above, and sometimes well above, the national average. The higher attaining pupils reach standards well above the national average. Boys and girls reach high similar standards because they understand exactly what they need to learn in order to make good progress, apply themselves very well, record logically and have good practical skills. Results in science tests are similar to those in mathematics but lower than those in English. In recent years, results in science in Years 7 to 9 have shown an improvement in line with the national trend. At the end of Year 11 in 2003 at GCSE, standards were above the national average for the higher grades (A*-C). All pupils obtained a grade within the full range of grades (A*-G). High standards in Years 10 and 11 reflect pupils' very good knowledge and understanding of facts and theories and their good numeracy skills. There was a marked improvement in 2004, and as a result more pupils joined Year 12 science groups. Higher attaining pupils are performing much better than pupils in other schools nationally. Overall there is no significant difference in the performances of boys and girls. Pupils are performing better in science than they are in English and mathematics in GCSE examinations. Evidence from the inspection confirms the pupils' performance in national tests and examinations and standards are now well above average. Standards are particularly high in research skills.
101. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. They achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and make good progress. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good. They make very good progress in Years 10 and 11. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve satisfactorily, but limited learning support for other lower attaining pupils means that most do not have sufficient attention to their individual learning needs. In Years 7 to 9, higher attaining pupils do very well because they enjoy learning and readily rise to the demands and challenges set by the teachers. Pupils make rapid strides in Years 10 and 11 because they work hard and take greater responsibility for their own learning. Coursework is of a high standard.
102. Teaching is good overall and it is very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers carefully plan lessons, using very good schemes of work. Their expertise, knowledge and understanding of the subject content are very strong. In Years 7 to 9 very occasionally work is not well matched to the needs of particular groups of pupils, for example those with special educational needs or the gifted and talented. The teacher's skilful use of questioning reinforces pupils' knowledge and understanding and results in pupils learning very well in Years 10 and 11. Older pupils apply themselves to their learning with maturity. They work productively, collaboratively and independently, using assessment information to monitor their own progress and to strive to reach targets set for them. The help given by committed technicians ensures that practical work is well organised and that no time is lost; this supports very good learning through practical experiences.
103. Leadership is excellent. There is first-rate commitment, high aspirations for improvement and a clear vision for future development of the Science College amongst a closely-knit team of knowledgeable teachers. Management is very good. The school examines and monitors its work effectively before taking targeted actions on the outcomes. The strong commitment to improvement extends to developing a range of initiatives to support the learning of gifted and talented pupils including clubs, extra accreditation and hands-on work with a local university where pupils were able to understand aspects of facial reconstruction. Some more attention is needed to monitoring more closely the achievements of groups of pupils, for example, pupils with special educational needs. The implementation of the Year 7 to 9 National Strategy is good and the use of the three-part lesson has improved the quality of teaching and learning by making lessons more interesting and effective. A wider use of scientific enquiry and ICT would improve teaching and learning still further.

104. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils are achieving better because teaching and learning have improved. Standards are rising in Years 10 and 11. Accommodation, textbook provision and resources for teaching and learning are now satisfactory and are soon to be improved further following the school's designation as a specialist Science College from September 2004.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory with many students not clear about their National Curriculum levels of performance and what they should do to improve.
- Teaching in the Years 10 and 11 examination course is good and leading to rising standards.
- Contributions made by all subjects towards ICT capability are not sufficiently well planned or co-ordinated.
- Computer resources have increased and lead to improved provision for pupils.
- Leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory

Commentary

105. Results in 2003 for the first group to complete the GNVQ course were satisfactory but have improved quickly so that in 2004 they were above average and represent good achievement. Boys and girls both performed well although girls did slightly better.
106. Attainment on entry is broadly average. Standards in Year 9 are below average and pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory largely because of weaknesses in provision. Work in files is poorly organised and presented with variable coverage of the different aspects of ICT. There is an emphasis on information communication and handling at the expense of control and modelling. Pupils are able to handle core applications quite competently but show limited understanding of more complex ideas and of the ability to critically reflect on their work in order to improve it.
107. Standards in Year 11 are above average in the GNVQ course. Pupils are able to analyse a problem and demonstrate the process of improving and evaluating their work in producing a solution. Most pupils, however, do not have taught ICT and due to the lack of planning and co-ordination in the use of ICT in other subjects, standards and achievement are no more than satisfactory. Pupils do habitually use ICT for their homework and are confident in the use of literacy-based programs and those designed to improve presentation. ICT is used well in some subjects such as geography but less effectively in other subjects, for example design and technology. This was a key issue at the previous inspection and still needs to be addressed. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is good in the taught course but satisfactory overall.
108. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Inspection of pupils' work revealed that teaching over time has been unsatisfactory as the range of work is too narrow with an emphasis on information handling and communication and too little work on control and modelling. However, lessons observed during the inspection ranged in quality from unsatisfactory to very good. The best teaching was seen in an optional multimedia course, which involved a creative and integrated approach to the development of ICT and design and technology skills and capability. The appointment of additional specialist ICT teachers has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning but advantage has not been taken of the National Strategy for Years 7 to 9 to provide curriculum guidance and support, especially

for non-specialist teachers who teach about half of all lessons. Assessment of pupils' work is unsatisfactory with little evidence of marking to support learning and insecure end of key stage teacher assessments. These were highlighted at the previous inspection and have only this year begun to be improved. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning in the examination course are good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and use relevant situations to engage pupils in their learning and enable them to make good progress against the assessment requirements.

109. Leadership and management of ICT are unsatisfactory. The previous inspection provided a clear agenda for improvement and the school has increased the provision of computer resources, specialist teachers and support staff, and improved the taught provision in Years 10 and 11. However, curriculum provision and assessment in Years 7 to 9 and the need to improve the co-ordination of cross-curricular provision in Years 10 and 11 are issues still to be addressed, therefore the improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. A more formal and rigorous system of ICT monitoring and support is needed to improve standards for all pupils.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

110. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory. Recent investments in the provision of computers now mean that the school has reached the national target of one computer for every five pupils and this has improved access. Very good use was observed in art with creative use of graphics software, and music where keyboards and composition software enhanced computer use. In other subjects, computer use was satisfactory but tended to focus on information communication and handling such as the use of word processing and presentation work. There was insufficient use of ICT in mathematics, modern foreign languages, design and technology and careers. An audit and action plan is needed to address the contribution of all subjects to the development of ICT capability across the school, and especially in Years 10 and 11.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision for geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and standards are rising.
- A new head of department and enthusiastic teachers are driving up standards.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Teachers are effective in accelerating the progress of boys.
- There is insufficient support for the lowest attainers and pupils with special educational needs.
- A potentially very good system of assessment is being put in place.
- Plans to implement practical work before the age of 14 are not yet completely in place.
- Raising coursework marks further is an early target for improving standards

Commentary

111. By the end of Year 9 in 2004 standards estimated by teachers were well above average for girls and above average for boys. The difference was wider than nationally. Standards seen in class are above average. Boys' progress is accelerating rapidly and achievement overall is good. There is not enough support in class for the lowest attainers and pupils with special educational needs and this slows their progress. Those of high prior attainment are regularly

achieving well above average standards because all pupils are increasingly well extended by challenging work, for example on world trade in fashion goods.

112. In 2003 results at GCSE were significantly below average and had declined slowly in previous years, but results for 2004 show a very good improvement and are now above average. Overall pupils exceeded their target grades and the number of high grades increased well. This is because pupils develop a strong body of written notes, collating and understanding information from a wide variety of sources.
113. Raising coursework marks is a good target for lifting standards even further. The popularity of geography is increasing so the subject is attracting more of its able Year 9 pupils to the GCSE course. Standards seen in class are therefore above average, for example work on the effects of high yield crop varieties on subsistence farming and the use of mathematics. Good achievement is promoted by extended opportunities for discussion, good opportunities to write at length, regular reference to examination requirements, regular revision and practice of examination technique.
114. Teaching and learning are good. Courses are well organised and learning is constantly reinforced by reference to course requirements, by revision testing and by marking to declared standards. Pace, challenge and high expectations of work and behaviour are characteristics of most lessons. Three levels of increasingly difficult task are offered. Pupils are challenged to choose a harder level then shown clearly how to reach it. The very positive response, particularly from boys, is driving up standards. Pupils write well in a variety of forms to express their learning about earthquakes and intensive farming. Pupils habitually use numeracy well. They frequently use ICT in Years 8 and 9 on projects about the Amazon Rain Forest and tourism. Pupils' work, for example on volcanoes and mapping the earth, is celebrated and very well displayed in classrooms. Teachers make a very good contribution to pupils' moral development through the pupils' work on world citizenship and fair trade. Good fieldwork at GCSE underpins coursework but plans for practical work before the age of 14 are only partially implemented. This impacts on achievement in Years 7 to 9. A potentially powerful system of assessment is only partly in place but very good use of information improves planning and sets targets for development.
115. A new head of department and his enthusiastic teachers are rapidly improving standards because leadership and management are good. The governors are monitoring performance supportively. Improvement planning is good and based on secure judgement. Access to computers is sometimes difficult and GCSE textbooks are well worn. The new data projectors are not yet fully installed to provide strong stimulating visual images. Improvement since the previous inspection has accelerated to be good after the new staff appointments.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average at the end of Year 9 and well above at the end of Year 11.
- Very good leadership and management make an important contribution to the high standards achieved.
- The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is restricted by insufficient classroom support.
- There is some inconsistency in marking and assessment of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

116. GCSE results in 2003, within the range of A*-C, were well above the national average. All of the entrants were awarded grades within the range of A*-G. The performance of girls was notably better than that of boys; however, this situation was reversed in 2004, when a greater number of boys than girls took the examination.
117. Achievement is very good. Higher attaining pupils, including the gifted and talented, achieve well owing to plentiful opportunities for extension work both inside and outside the classroom. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory but is restricted by the inadequacy of classroom assistance and support. Pupils' attitudes to learning make a substantial contribution to their good achievement. They work hard and apply themselves well.
118. Year 9 pupils' achievement is above average in chronology, range and depth of knowledge and understanding of the subject, and in skills of enquiry and communication. Their ability to appreciate different interpretations of history is average. Other areas in which they make notable progress are the appreciation of cause and effect of events, their use of both primary and secondary sources and in their literacy. Year 11 pupils' achievement is well above average and in line with the GCSE results of both 2003 and 2004. High standards are evident in the pupils' work about the Russian Revolution, for example their explanations of the key differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.
119. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. They take every opportunity to challenge them, so pupils develop their thinking and confidence. Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour so that distractions to learning are kept to a minimum. Regularly set homework reinforces and extends what has been learned in class and helps pupils prepare for the next stage of their learning. Teachers are also concerned that pupils are given every opportunity to practise and extend their speaking and listening, reading and writing skills. However, opportunities to address interpretations of history, particularly in Year 8, are not always taken and there is some inconsistency in the thoroughness with which the work of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is marked and assessed.
120. Leadership and management of the subject are both very good and are primarily directed towards the maintenance of high academic standards. A wide range of learning opportunities has been created both within and without the classroom. There is a very good ethos for learning that is immediately apparent. The head of department is a good role model for other teachers of the subject in both her dedication and quality of teaching. The quality of all of the teaching and learning is carefully monitored, via classroom observations and other means. This ensures very good quality.
121. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection. Academic standards have risen. The use of ICT by pupils has increased, particularly for homework, which often requires them to use the Internet although there remains scope for a greater use in lessons.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

The overall provision for design and technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Subject leadership and management are good.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have good expertise and are consistent in achieving high quality work from pupils.
- Pupils are not well enough informed about the assessment of work and how to achieve their targets.
- Provision for gifted and talented pupils is not good enough.
- The under-use of ICT inhibits progress.

Commentary

122. Standards are above the national average by the end of Year 9. Boys and girls show consistently good progress in their lessons from Year 7 onwards. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average. In 2003, GCSE results were above the national average. The trend over the past five years shows a sustained pattern of improvement. Design and technology results are also significantly better than those of most other subjects in school. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and in GCSE examination classes.
123. Pupils show care and attention to detail in their work when developing skills and techniques. Teachers' high expectations, combined with well-structured programmes of work, promote good achievement in Years 7 to 9. Pupils understand the processes of designing and making and they are confident and successful in their project work. Boys and girls are equally well motivated to succeed. Pupils with special needs make good progress. Gifted and talented pupils are not sufficiently challenged. In Year 11 pupils' design projects show a particularly good understanding of materials and processes and use of composition, shape, texture and colour.
124. The quality of teaching is good; some very good lessons were observed. Lessons are well prepared and class management is very good. Pupils show consistently good attitudes to work and are well motivated to learn. Relationships are very good. Teachers' expertise and expectations of pupils are consistently high and as a result, work is often imaginative and pupils take pride in it. Using the work of famous designers as stimulus in lessons opens pupils' eyes to a wider context for designing, as well as providing good resources for project work. There is some inconsistency in the interpretation of learning objectives in lessons. Pupils do not always understand how their work will be evaluated or assessed. Therefore it is difficult for them to understand what they need to do to gain higher marks.
125. The quality of leadership in design and technology is very good and the overall management of all specialist areas is good. There is a good sense of teamwork and commitment to self-improvement. Policy documents, schemes of work and the department development plan are well structured and derived from self-evaluation. The evaluation process does not focus closely enough on gains in pupils' learning. Health and safety practice is good. Accommodation is satisfactory but restricts the number of pupils who are able to study for GCSE examinations. . The use of ICT is satisfactory but is underdeveloped in Years 10 and 11 project work. The current arrangements for access to ICT inhibit progress, as there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use it. Since the previous inspection very good progress has been made in addressing all aspects of the key issue identified.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Excellent teaching is leading to excellent learning and very high standards.

- Pupils demonstrate very high standards of creativity, skill and understanding.
- Pupils experience a broad programme of fine art and design activities.
- Purposeful assessment results in pupils knowing what they have to do to improve.
- The organisation of the timetable results in some pupils' needs not being met.

Commentary

126. Standards are well above average by the end of Year 9. This outstanding department successfully promotes skill, creativity and understanding. Achievement by Years 9 and 11 is very good. From average attainment in Year 7, almost all girls and boys reach at least the expected national level by the end of Year 9: many are way beyond it. Standards by the end of Year 11 are very high. The 2003 GCSE examinations were part of an ongoing trend upwards, with higher grade passes, A*-C, well above the national average. Standards by the end of Year 11 are outstanding. This was reflected in the 2004 GCSE results that showed a further very substantial rise.
127. Pupils rapidly acquire essential skills in using line, tone, colour, pattern, texture, shape and form. Fertile learning exposes them to exemplar work by their peers and by different artists. Pupils have a good art vocabulary, and they record facts and personal opinions very well. The introduction of other art cultures raises their understanding of how symbols and art express values and beliefs in different societies. Most pupils use computers effectively to research and create art. Homework is purposeful. Pupils have to produce individual hand-made books, which bring together the strands of their learning; this is good, general practice. In Years 10 and 11 pupils flourish as independent, creative artists. In fine art, they exploit their knowledge of artists and techniques well, revising their work until it is of the highest standard. In textiles, pupils apply colour, with great verve, to fashion fabric. In three-dimensional work, they use different scales and materials to produce bold, imaginative sculpture, enriched by the study of contemporary artists. Pupils' exceptionally creative sketchbooks are quite delightful. Cross-curricular links with design and technology give pupils a really good understanding of design principles; all acquire exceptionally good making skills in wood, metal and plastic. Their work matters to them and pupils pay great attention to detail and safe practices.
128. Because lessons are very interesting and varied, pupils become engrossed in learning about new activities and ideas. Highly skilled teachers communicate their own enthusiasm engagingly to the pupils. A purposeful unity of approach arises from sharing good practice through mutual observations. Teachers explain very clearly what is to be learned in each lesson and they follow up very good demonstrations with individual guidance that leads to above average fine art skills. Teachers ask relevant questions to check pupils' understanding and make sure they do so. Work is regularly marked and assessment identifies precisely what pupils have to do to improve. As a result, pupils produce a better than average body of artwork and none goes uncompleted. Because they share in this assessment process, pupils eagerly identify their own strengths and areas for improvement. All this results in very rapid learning across the ability range. Gifted and talented pupils are well provided for when they work out of school with practising artists. Timetable restrictions, and limited accommodation, result in some pupils not being able to follow their interest in textiles in Years 8 and 9.
129. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department regularly reviews the performance of all aspects of the department and has a clear vision of how to meet pupils' needs. There is a good understanding of how to analyse the range of performance data and achieve targets of performance. Below average funding is compensated by the winning of external grants, for example to provide an essential computer suite. There has been very good progress since the previous inspection.

Music

Overall provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and management are significantly raising attainment and achievement.
- Enthusiastic, inspirational teaching results in very good creative and intellectual effort; pupils respond eagerly.
- The very good music ICT resources make significant contributions to learning.
- The split lunchtime and transport arrangements cause severe rehearsal problems.
- There is some unimaginative teaching that restricts achievement.

Commentary

130. Results at GCSE in 2003 were below the national average, but in 2004 there was a remarkable improvement, with pupils achieving well above average grades, thanks to very good teaching.
131. By the end of Year 9 standards are in line with national averages. A focus on key musical skills and musical literacy has resulted in rapidly rising standards. Pupils are able to work at their own pace through the keyboard programme, and frequent self-assessment is supporting very good progress. Pupils are growing in confidence so they are able to perform in front of others to a good standard. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is very good. Pupils who are gifted and talented or have special educational needs achieve equally well because of extra help and encouragement, as well as tasks which challenge them appropriately.
132. There are no pupils taking music in Year 11. Standards of attainment in Year 10 are above average. Music technology is making a significant contribution to learning, especially in developing composing skills. Pupils have a good grasp of structure and shape, and recordings listened to, as well as classroom performance, suggest this group will equal and even exceed last year's GCSE successes. Achievement continues to be very good and future plans for A-level music are being built on solid foundations.
133. Teaching and learning are very good. Where teaching is very good, lessons are well planned, teaching is enthusiastic and infectious, and strategies effectively encourage independent learning and self-assessment. Pupils work with great concentration because they know they are being taught well, and therefore rise to the challenge and expectation of their teacher. Occasionally, teaching is less effective because classroom music teaching skills are weaker, and work is not sufficiently challenging or securely tied to pupils' learning needs. Gifted and talented pupils provide good role models, especially in performance. Lower attaining pupils learn very well because teachers support them well but expect a high level of intellectual and creative effort. Careful assessment lies at the heart of this rapid progress; it helps achievement because targets are both challenging and manageable. Pupils are surprised and delighted at their growing skills and musical knowledge.
134. Leadership and management are both excellent. The subject has been rapidly turned around because of new enthusiastically infectious and inspirational leadership, which has vision and a determination to achieve excellence. Enriching activities include hand-bell ringing, vocal groups, wind ensembles, Samba band and concerts. Split lunchtime and post-school transport arrangements cause serious problems; these stop younger pupils joining with older instrument players and make choir or orchestra rehearsals impossible. There has been an upturn in the numbers wishing to learn musical instruments, and the very good tuition offered by peripatetic teachers results in a 100 per cent pass rate in the Associated Board examinations.

135. Accommodation and ICT resources are very good and account, in significant measure, for the rapid growth in attainment and achievement. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, with all the issues raised then successfully addressed.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads directly to very good learning.
- Well-motivated pupils achieve very well.
- Very good leadership and management result in high standards and very good achievement.
- Pupils are not sufficiently active in their own assessments.

Commentary

136. Results at GCSE are very good. In 2003, the number of pupils who passed with grades A*-C was above average; this was expected and reflects accurate tracking of pupils. In 2004 A*-C passes were well above the national average.
137. Pupils' standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are average, with a very wide range of attainment. The department holds detailed and reliable evidence of this. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average. Pupils are able to perform skilfully in the full range of games and aesthetic activities, including football, netball and gymnastics. By the end of Year 11, standards are clearly above average in the core course, notably in football, netball, basketball and dance, and well above average at GCSE. Many pupils reach high standards in orienteering. There is no difference in the progress made by different groups of pupils. This represents very good achievement over time for all pupils.
138. Pupils know how and why to warm up before exercise, and they have a good knowledge of how to improve the quality of the activities they undertake. Girls can demonstrate precise footwork in netball, and they know how to evade an opponent to make space. Boys are able to partake in high paced and complex basketball skill development practices, and apply their skill in conditioned games. Pupils are prepared to offer very pertinent suggestions about how to improve the quality of their own and others' work, and are often fully engaged in officiating activities when teachers are coaching. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers.
139. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. No teaching observed was less than very good. All specialist teachers have secure knowledge and are enthusiastic in their approach. Class management is based on the high expectation that pupils will work hard at very challenging tasks. Very good knowledge, of how pupils learn best, leads directly to very good progress for all. The use of shared learning objectives, allied to very searching questions which probe pupils' understanding and knowledge, ensures consistency and progression. Pupils of all ages are encouraged through high quality teaching to develop their physical skills and intellectual understanding to the highest possible levels. Teachers provide pupils with many opportunities outside normal school hours to refine, extend and apply the full range of their skills and interests.
140. Pupils respond with commitment to the demanding environment created by purposeful and stimulating teaching. They are very well turned out and are very positive about the subject. They pay close attention to teacher guidance, and work with energy and enthusiasm. Relationships and behaviour are very good, and this contributes strongly to very good overall progress in lessons.

141. Leadership and management are both very good. The department knows how to reach the high standards it wishes to achieve. The energetic staff group make a well-balanced team, and act as very good role models. They are consistent in their challenge and support. Excellent lesson planning is firmly based on secure knowledge of how well pupils are moving forward. Assessments provide accurate information on pupils' standards, and this information is used for target setting, and to inform curriculum development. The staff spend a great deal of professional time recording and translating assessments into a nationally recognised format.
142. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Strong aspects have been maintained and areas noted for improvement have been successfully addressed. The subject makes a very noticeable contribution to the general whole school ethos.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

The provision for citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make insufficient gains in knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Other subjects such as geography, history and English make an important contribution to promoting an understanding of citizenship.
- Pupils are encouraged to think about topical issues in a good range of lessons; this aids their personal development.
- The school council and close links with a local special school give pupils a good opportunity to participate in their own and other communities and develop a sense of responsibility.
- There is no formal system of assessment for citizenship.

Commentary

143. Although other subjects make an important contribution to pupils' understanding of citizenship, there are too many important omissions in the programme of study. There is insufficient coverage of human rights, the work of government and parliament, democracy, the economy and international organisations such as the European Union and the United Nations. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in these areas and, as a result, achievement is unsatisfactory.
144. Where elements of citizenship are taught through other subjects teaching is often good but teachers do not make it clear to pupils that citizenship is being taught. Elements of citizenship are taught within the social education programme and many teachers are involved. Teachers bring with them many of the good quality skills and methodologies they use in other lessons; however, the quality of teaching is not monitored or co-ordinated and cannot be assured.
145. Pupils are encouraged to think about a wide range of issues in other lessons but there are insufficient planned opportunities to develop spiritual, moral, social or cultural understanding in specific citizenship lessons. Pupils do successfully develop skills of enquiry and communication in many subjects but skills of independent investigation and analysis are underdeveloped in citizenship; a programme aimed at improving these skills has begun for Year 11 pupils. It is too early to judge its success.
146. School and year councils are developing well. Together with various working groups they provide pupils with a good opportunity to be actively involved in the democratic process and

decision making. The school's close links with a local special school successfully promote pupils' understanding of disability and encourage responsibility.

147. Leadership and management of citizenship are unsatisfactory. A thorough survey of the delivery of citizenship through other subjects was carried out two years ago and areas that were inadequately covered were clearly identified. However, effective action to remedy these shortcomings has not been taken. Arrangements for assessing pupils' work are unsatisfactory.

Personal social and health education

Provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership and management of PSHE are unsatisfactory.
- PSHE lessons have not been designed with a clear focus on pupils' needs.
- The curriculum lacks balance.
- Other subjects such as science make an important contribution to the PSHE curriculum.

Commentary

148. Many of the lessons in Years 7 to 9 focus on topics that are not directly related to pupils' needs; there is an inappropriate emphasis on careers' education, leaving too little time to address important health, social and moral issues. For example, younger pupils study a module 'Work in the Society' and 'Health during Pregnancy'. There is an absence of lessons about puberty, drug education, alcohol abuse and smoking. Although some of these issues are addressed in science lessons, insufficient attention is paid to health education and social education within the PSHE programme of study.
149. Sex education meets statutory requirements but is not introduced until Year 10, which is too late. Although drugs education is delivered by external agencies with high levels of expertise, this is not in PSHE lessons and involves large groups. This restricts the range of activities that can be undertaken and has a detrimental effect on learning.
150. PSHE lessons are taught by a high number of teachers. The quality of teaching is not adequately monitored but many teachers are highly skilled. They bring with them transferable skills from other lessons including good use of group and paired work but their potential is not fully harnessed. The narrow curriculum leads to unsatisfactory achievement during PSHE lessons.
151. Leadership and management of PSHE are unsatisfactory. There is an incoherent programme, which fails to support pupils' personal development and does not complement the good opportunities for personal development found in other subjects. An audit of PSHE, two years ago, has not been fully used to develop appropriate provision and use of time.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

Six subjects and courses were inspected and are reported in detail. Work in drama, French, German, physics, art and design, leisure and recreation and leisure and tourism was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for AS courses completed in 2003, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

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
English	23	100	82.8	26.1	17.5	36.9	28.7
French	4	100	78.2	50	18.9	37.5	27.6
German	8	100	81.5	12.5	19.3	32.5	28.9
Mathematics	13	100	61.9	15.4	17.1	32.3	22.1
Further mathematics	1	100	N/A	100	N/A	50.0	N/A
Biology	15	100	65.2	0	11.1	28.0	20.6
Chemistry	17	100	72.7	23.5	13.9	34.7	24.1
Physics	10	100	68.6	10	14.4	31.0	22.7
Design and technology	8	100	74.9	0	15.1	31.3	25.3
Home economics	2	100	78.4	100	17.6	50.0	27.1
Business studies	13	100	76.4	23.8	16.3	31.5	26.2
Art and design	25	100	73.9	68	28.4	51.6	29.7
Theatre studies	7	100	N/A	100	N/A	52.9	N/A
Geography	14	100	74.3	14.3	19.8	37.1	26.5
History	7	100	80.7	14.3	19.8	37.1	28.6
Religious studies	5	100	80.2	40	22.6	34.0	29.8
Sociology	2	100	71.8	50	18.4	40.0	25.4
Psychology	1	100	N/A	0	N/A	20.0	N/A

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
English	13	100	99.4	30.8	36.3	75.4	80.9
French	1	100	98.8	100	51.5	120	87.6
German	5	100	98.4	20	47.9	72.0	84.8
Mathematics	12	100	96.7	41.7	55.6	78.3	88.8
Biology	5	100	96.4	20	39.2	72.0	78.6
Chemistry	17	100	97.6	23.5	48.9	69.4	84.8
Physics	5	100	96.7	40	44.6	68.0	81.7
Design and technology	5	100	97.8	20	34.9	84.0	77.9
Home economics	2	100	98.1	0	34.6	70.0	76.6
Business studies	9	100	98.7	22.2	36.8	73.3	80.1
Art and design	16	100	98.6	43.8	50.2	88.75	87.5
Theatre studies	10	100	N/A	20	N/A	68.0	N/A
Geography	8	100	98.7	37.5	44.5	72.5	84.1
History	5	100	98.9	20	44.6	72.0	84.6
Theology	8	100	98.8	12.5	46.7	62.5	85.6
Psychology	5	100	N/A	40	N/A	88.0	N/A
Health and social care	2	100	92.4	0	21.7	60.0	65.3
Leisure and recreation	5	60	88.1	0	15.0	36.0	60.7

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Information and communication technology	9	88	N/A	11	N/A	11	N/A
Leisure and tourism	5	100	N/A	0	N/A	0	N/A

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement.
- High expectations develop confidence and challenge.
- Subject leadership provides a clear vision for staff and students.
- Analysis of data is not rigorous enough to target individual achievement.
- Some students are not sure how to improve.

Commentary

152. Results in the 2003 A-level and AS-level English language and literature examinations were broadly in line with the national average and this was reflected in the work seen. As students enter the sixth form with standards that are below the national average this represents good achievement. Students make critical observations and most use sophisticated technical vocabulary in their writing. Extended writing is a strong feature of the students' work and their independent research skills are generally well developed. Some lower attaining students do not make sophisticated inferences from texts or sustain detailed textual analysis. Their literacy skills are weaker, especially spelling.
153. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and includes both very good and satisfactory teaching and learning. Good relationships create a positive working atmosphere, reflecting students' positive comments about teaching and learning. In lessons there is a brisk pace, students are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Students enjoy their work with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and high expectation. In a very good Year 12 lesson studying poetry, students analysed carefully and accurately because of their teacher's careful planning and high expectations. The teachers make satisfactory use of assessment data for curriculum planning and setting targets for improvement. This is not rigorous enough to target all individuals and consequently some students are not sure how to improve. Students whose first language is not English achieve as well as other students because they are identified in well-planned lessons.
154. The leadership of the department provides a clear vision for staff and students. Good management results in shared preparation of schemes of work. This produces well-planned lessons, work matched to students' needs and the development of staff. Very good accommodation provides a positive atmosphere for learning. Progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory; standards, teaching and achievement have been maintained.

Modern foreign languages

155. Lessons were sampled in **French** and **German**. Teaching of French was **satisfactory** in Year 12 and **good** in Year 13. The good teaching, combined with the students' very good attitudes, resulted in good achievement, leading to well above average standards. Expectations and demands were lower in the Year 12 lesson. Teaching in German was **very good**; the very interesting content of the lesson stimulated the students to achieve very well, also leading to well above average standards.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have strong knowledge of the subject at A-level.
- Some unsatisfactory teaching leads to inadequate learning.
- Where teaching is good, students become engaged and learn well.
- Students' attitudes towards A-level mathematics are positive.

Commentary

156. Students in the sixth form have a choice of two courses in A-level and AS-level mathematics, either pure mathematics with statistics, or pure mathematics with mechanics. There is also provision for students to re-sit GCSE mathematics. The school, in conjunction with a partner institution, has recently started to provide a further mathematics course.
157. The A-level mathematics results in 2003 were close to the national average and were similar in 2004. Given that the intake to the course at the start of Year 12 is average this represents satisfactory achievement. The difference between the performance of boys and girls is not significant, especially given the low numbers involved. Standards observed during the inspection were average. Students work diligently on mechanics and develop good understanding.
158. Teaching is satisfactory overall but of variable quality. Most lessons are very well planned, and show good teacher knowledge of the subject, high expectations of students and very strong teacher-student relationships. As a result, students are engaged in their work, and their learning is good. However, there is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching that shows a lack of structure and poor planning. Here, students simply do not cover enough work to allow the effective learning of essential skills. Students who gain high grades in GCSE mathematics achieve appropriate grades in the sixth form. However, students who start the course without the highest GCSE grades can sometimes struggle to pass the examination. Learning is adversely affected, for example by technical weaknesses in algebra.
159. The teaching and the organisation of the re-sit GCSE mathematics course are good, with a firm structure to the lessons. This allows students to make significant gains in understanding of GCSE mathematics. However, the recent results of such a course show that few students have achieved a C grade.
160. Students have largely positive views of A-level mathematics. They are given good guidance about the subject before they start and they are well supported by teachers as they progress. Students strongly value the availability and accessibility of teachers away from the classroom.
161. The management of the department is good and there is thorough and clear documentation. Schemes of work are clear and accessible. There is good use made of examination data to show trends and to plan ahead. Procedures for the assessment of students are good. There are good quality textbooks, which are well used. The leadership of the department is satisfactory. Clear plans to drive up standards are hampered by the variable quality of the teaching. A good attempt has been made to share best practice by guiding lesson planning and providing illustrations of good teaching; this has been only partially effective.

Mathematics across the curriculum

162. There is much good practice in geography at AS-level. Here good quality numerical skills help students understand various types of graphs, including Lorenz curves. In physics, however, some students struggle with mathematical concepts, notably calculus. Even those students who are studying mathematics sometimes find difficulty in transferring skills from one subject to the other. Weaknesses in mathematics make A-level physics very difficult for some students.

SCIENCE

Chemistry was the focus of the inspection. **Physics** was also sampled. In the physics lesson, teaching was **very good**. A thorough command of the subject knowledge was successfully shared with students who were alert and responsive. Achievement was good and students reached average standards.

Chemistry

Overall the provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in A-level are below the national average but are improving.
- Teaching is consistently good and students learn well as a result.
- Very good attitudes and personal development underpin students' good achievement.
- Staffing of the department is very good.
- ICT is not used often enough to help learning.

Commentary

163. Results in A-level examinations in 2003 were below the national average although all students gained at least a pass grade. These results were an improvement on the previous year, with more candidates gaining higher A-B grades. Retention rates are good with most students completing their chemistry course.
164. Current standards of work are above average in both Years 12 and 13 and reflect improving standards. Students are achieving well and producing work consistent with higher grades. There is a good focus on experimental techniques that make a good contribution to overall standards. Students grasp and learn concepts in chemistry well. For example, Year 13 students were able to use their prior knowledge and understanding of chemistry to investigate more complex concepts such as organic reaction mechanisms. As a result, they made good progress in this topic.
165. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are very well qualified and have a very good knowledge and understanding of chemistry. As a result, their explanations of chemical phenomena are clear and precise and enable students to learn better. Homework, an integral part of the modules studied, focuses well on the most relevant aspects of the course and consolidates learning well. Expectations of students are high and, accordingly, work is sufficiently challenging. Although students gain some exposure to ICT in their lessons, it is not used frequently enough to improve the presentation of the more intellectually demanding parts of the course. As a result of consistently good teaching, students make good progress in their lessons and their achievement is good. They respond well to challenge, work hard and show considerable interest in their work. Assessment gives teachers a good appreciation of the

strengths and weaknesses of individual students and this enables students to make better progress in their learning.

166. Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject. These positive views, coupled with the teaching, produce an effective learning environment where better academic results can be achieved.
167. The subject is well managed with a clear sense of direction. Leadership is good. Evaluation of the department's strengths and weaknesses is very good and is leading to effective strategies for improving standards. Staffing of the department is now very good. Since the previous inspection improvement has been good and the department is well placed to move forward.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Overall, provision for geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership is driving a strong impetus for change: standards are rising.
- Satisfactory unvalidated A-level results in 2004 improved on the previous year and students added value to their prior attainment.
- Achievement is very good in class at AS-level where teaching and learning seen in lessons were very good.

Commentary

168. The good improvement brought about by the new head of department in the main school has not yet had time to infiltrate the whole sixth form so that provision and improvement since the previous inspection are satisfactory. However, standards are rising quickly.
169. In recent years attainment on entry has been below that of other sixth forms and numbers have been too small to make secure judgements against national standards. Some individual results stand out, but overall results have been average at AS-level and A-level. For most students, achievement has been satisfactory.
170. Unvalidated A-level results in 2004 improved well to be satisfactory overall. All students passed, the number of high grades increased and most students added value to their predicted grades. Improvement arose from good teaching that provided a substantial body of good note-taking using a wide variety of source materials; marking was supportive and set clear targets for improvement. Students were well taught to pass examinations. Unvalidated results at AS-level in 2004 were low; achievement was unsatisfactory and only one student was retained to A-level. Because no decision was made about the continuation of the A-level course until after the inspection, it was not possible to inspect A-level lessons.
171. Because GCSE results have improved substantially, the popularity of geography has risen in Year 12 at AS-level. There is a viable group whose attainment on entry was above average. Consequently, standards seen in class are above average. Students quickly learn the skill of accurate description, for example of population distribution in Egypt, and can categorise the causes. They quickly grasp the principles for comparing regional populations. They begin to assess the strengths and weaknesses of specialist techniques. Consequently all students grow visibly in confidence and above average students achieve very well. Students with specific learning difficulties make good oral contributions and cope with the written work.

172. Teaching and learning are very good; subject expertise, pace, challenge and very good organisation are characteristic, and students respond very well. Relationships are relaxed. Teachers and learners enjoy their lessons and morale is high. Strong local and regional examples of practical and fieldwork develop students' key subject skills. They study the changing urban morphology of Chester in detail, particularly the peripheral developments of major modern foot-loose business.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Drama

173. A lesson of **drama** was sampled. Teaching was **excellent**. The lesson was very well prepared and students were highly challenged. Standards achieved in the lesson were outstanding.

Art and design

174. One Year 13 lesson was observed and a selection of work and sketchbooks scrutinised. Teaching was **very good**. Students demonstrate a good knowledge of contemporary art in their tutorial group discussions. They are building successfully on their previous art experiences, acquiring new skills and developing their creativity to an even higher standard.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

175. A lesson of **leisure and recreation** was sampled. Teaching was good, and pupils built up their confidence when making presentations. Effective planning and support led to good achievement. Standards were average in relation to course expectations.

176. A lesson of **leisure and tourism** was sampled. Teaching was good. Good knowledge and understanding were shared well with students who learnt to use the correct terminology very well. Students achieved well, building on previous knowledge and understanding, and reaching above average standards.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Knowledgeable, enthusiastic teaching ensures students work productively and make progress.
- Good leadership and management create a clear focus for further subject development.
- There is no dedicated business studies area to provide an appropriate learning environment and easy access to resources.
- Students have a positive attitude, appreciating the help and guidance offered by the teacher.
- There are no extra opportunities for students to learn at first hand about practical business.

Commentary

177. Overall results for business studies A-level in 2003 and 2004 have been marginally below the national average, although it is commendable that all students entered achieved at least a pass; none achieved the top grade. Results for the AS-level over the two years are similar with some significant underachievement from a small number of students in 2004. However, achievement is broadly satisfactory overall. Current students demonstrate an improving

standard of attainment and achievement with all able to use and explain basic business terminology well, many with consummate ease.

178. Teaching and learning are good because very well prepared lessons are enthusiastically taught, engaging students' interest and keeping them focused on the topic. For example, in a good Year 12 lesson, the teacher's brisk start, rapid delivery and questioning ensured students' attention was maintained throughout. Students' work is assessed and monitored thoroughly and feedback is relevant and states how students can improve. They appreciate the access to the teacher for extra help and guidance; this is another reason why they have a very positive attitude to the subject.
179. Leadership and management are good, There is a clear focus on teaching and learning to improve achievement and there are ambitious plans for developing the subject further. The lack of a base makes it hard for students to get at resources and for teachers to provide extra-curricular activities. Resources are, however, improving and students have very good access to the Internet, but there are no opportunities for students to experience the practical aspects of the subject through visiting speakers and business trips; this limits achievement. There is insufficient emphasis on how the subject can improve students' literacy and numeracy skills. The subject was not reported on in the previous inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and social care

Overall provision in health and social care is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching encourages independent learning and verbal communication skills.
- Students' very good commitment and effort contribute significantly to their satisfactory achievement.
- Some dull teaching is a barrier to attainment.
- Observation of lessons is not effective enough to ensure consistently high standards of teaching.

Commentary

180. The 2003 AVCE results in 2004 were below the previous national average, but they improved on 2003, with all students passing.
181. There is insufficient evidence to form a judgement on standards in Year 12. Students in Year 13 are working close to, but below, the national average. One or two students are working towards the higher grades and can produce work of a good standard – well written and showing a good understanding of, for example, child development. Aspects are often treated in a simplistic way and a narrative style predominates. Portfolios are laid out well and questionnaires are well constructed, providing a good evidence base. Written work shows good improvement over time and growing understanding of issues, for instance the impact of organisation funding. Achievement is satisfactory, given the below average prior attainment of most students, and suggests this course is well matched to those whose abilities lie along the vocational careers path.
182. Teaching is satisfactory, but learning is better because teaching strategies encourage independent learning and students are very committed. Where teaching is good, the teacher's subject knowledge is secure, and careful planning includes effective strategies to improve, for example, thinking and discussion skills. Lower attaining students are supported well both in

redrafting their work and in research methods. Students' dedication to the course is very good and they speak highly of it. When the teacher's subject knowledge is insecure work does not meet the students' learning needs. Assessment procedures are in place and effective, because marking and feedback show the students how to improve.

183. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good features include the effective planning and building up of a department, which is successful in providing a vocational study option for a number of students, and a level of care, which inspires tremendous loyalty and commitment from them. However, occasional weak teaching has not been tackled and this is a barrier to raising attainment. An audit of key skills has yet to be carried out, so that close monitoring of skill acquisition can inform teaching and learning.
184. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. ICT is used well to support independent research. The department makes a very good contribution to the students' personal development. Enrichment opportunities, such as outside placements in social care settings, for instance special schools or residential establishments, are being successfully developed.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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