

INSPECTION REPORT

SAINT THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

North Shields

LEA area: North Tyneside

Unique reference number: 108648

Headteacher: John Marshall

Lead inspector: William Baxendale

Dates of inspection: 4th – 8th October 2004

Inspection number: 269520

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:	1565
School address:	Lynn Road North Shields Tyne and Wear
Postcode:	NE29 8LF
Telephone number:	0191 200 63 33
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	F Stimpson
Date of previous inspection:	16 th – 20 th November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Saint Thomas More Roman Catholic comprehensive school is bigger than most other secondary schools. As a specialist Mathematics and Computing College, it educates 1565 boys and girls; of these 295 are in the sixth form. The percentage of pupils with a mother tongue believed not to be English is low. The pupils come from average socio-economic backgrounds. A broadly average proportion is known to be eligible for free school meals. Pupil mobility is low. The pupils' attainment when they start as 11 year olds is above average in English, mathematics and science. There is an above average proportion identified as having special educational needs, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The needs include dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties, hearing impairment, physical and autistic conditions. The school has numerous distinctive features: it is a 'Leading Edge' school, has several school achievement awards, a Sportsmark, and a basic-skills mark. It received a high value-added award from the DfES in 2003 and it has had beacon status. It holds the Investor in People award; it is a training and partnership promotion school. The Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme operates. The school benefits from Excellence in Cities grants. It is as part of this arrangement, a Networked Learning Community.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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19743	A Taylor	Lay inspector	
27416	T Howard	Team inspector	Mathematics
19214	G Price	Team inspector	English, English as an additional language
27050	V Blackburn	Team inspector	Science
22906	B Hodgson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
30749	H Boyle	Team inspector	Art and design
22524	S Innes	Team inspector	Design and technology
22849	R Catlow	Team inspector	Geography
31191	D Sylph	Team inspector	History, Citizenship
24887	Y Salmons	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
12475	S Johnson	Team inspector	Music
03943	D Innes	Team inspector	Physical education, Special educational needs
22695	R Cardinal	Team inspector	Business studies
11838	D Cronin	Team inspector	Sixth form German
18076	H Dodd	Team Inspector	Sixth form biology
19295	P Wall	Team inspector	Sixth form health and social care

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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	16
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	23
OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES	26
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	27
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	54

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Saint Thomas More is a **very good school** with **outstanding features**, typified by its excellent atmosphere for learning. It is over-subscribed. Continuing a five-year upward trend, the 2004 results in GCSE and A-level examinations were the best in the school's history. Very good teaching and learning help pupils and students to achieve very well. Very good competence in mathematics and English helps the pupils to do at least well in all other subjects. Excellent leadership and delegation on the part of the headteacher give everyone responsibility for doing their best: leadership and management are very good; the school checks its own performance meticulously. Governance is very good. Exemplary partnerships with area schools, colleges and other organisations, including the local education authority (LEA), raise standards. Matching very good quality provision with the below average cost of educating pupils, the school gives **excellent value for money**.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Its Catholic ethos that exercises a very strong influence on personal development
- Its very good quality of education that underpins pupils' and students' very good achievement
- An excellent training programme that has the improvement of learning as its sole purpose
- Its specialist school status and dynamic partnerships that are very effective in raising standards
- Marking that does not always give clear indications on how to improve
- Some occasional under-performance by higher attainers at different times
- Some lack of clarity in the organisation of provision for special educational needs

Improvements since the previous inspection are **very good**. Each of the key issues revealed has been resolved. Standards have risen and the quality of education is now very good. There are big improvements in the accommodation, and the school's popularity and roll have risen. The school exercises an ever-wider excellent influence over the quality of education in the region.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Achievement is very good. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 because their competence in English and mathematics helps them to cope; they speak, read, write and understand well. They calculate, measure, draw and use graphs well enough to help them make at least good progress in other subjects. Increasingly sophisticated use of information and communication technology (ICT) for research and presentation raises standards. By the end of Year 9, pupils reach well above national average standards in English, mathematics and science and above expected standards in all the other subjects they study. Compared with similar schools, mathematics results were, in 2003, above average, but those in English and science were below. Higher attainers were not stretched enough.

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

Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average - E in the lowest 5 percent nationally.*

For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Although GCSE results dipped a little in 2003, quick action by the school produced the best ones in its history in 2004. Inspection evidence suggests continuing improvements. Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. They do particularly well in English and mathematics. Lower attainers and those with special educational needs also do very well. In the last three years, very few pupils have left without at least five higher grade GCSE passes. Boys' performance is closer to that of girls than is

the case nationally. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds do well, although newcomers would benefit for more help with English. Sixth form students achieve very well; results in A-level and VCE examinations are well above average. Average point scores are rising and are well above average.

Pupils' attitudes are very good; behaviour is very good. Pupils are keen and eager; they learn very well, as a result. **Attendance is very good.** Pupils are willing partners in what is very good provision. **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.** Opportunities for personal development abound and pupils grasp them readily.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is very good. Pupils' good overall achievements stem from consistent, **very good teaching** that leads to **very good learning**. The school's first rate response to a national initiative to improve learning for all pupils is clear. Pupils' keen appetites to learn are satisfied by imaginatively presented lessons in which they are fully involved and engrossed. **Assessment is good;** performance is analysed very closely, with action taken to help pupils do better. Sometimes marking of written work fails to show how improvements may be made.

The curriculum is good. Broad and balanced, it meets all statutory requirements. Vocational studies make a good contribution to breadth in Years 10 and 11, with a range of options leading to national accreditation and an appropriate pathway to vocational courses post-16. In the sixth form, however, there are too few such options appropriate to the needs of low attainers. **Care and guidance are also very good.** They help pupils improve their work. Settling-in arrangements are good. The school responds very well to pupils' views.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is very good. Leadership seeks continuous improvement through meticulous analysis of performance. First class leadership, drawing particularly well on a very strong team of assistant heads, leads to a fertile inter-dependence in which nothing but top quality is acceptable. Action planning and excellent training programmes focus only on better teaching and learning; these are now very good, leading to pupils' and students' very good achievement. **Management is very good.** The school is very well run. **Governance is very good.** Governors not only hold the school closely to account, but play key parts in setting its excellent clarity of purpose. Partnerships with other institutions and the community are outstanding.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils have very good views of the school. Parents feel very easy about approaching the school; they appreciate the standards pupils achieve, teaching and learning quality; very good leadership, induction arrangements and the pastoral organisation. Although some pupils and parents expressed concern about bullying, they were mainly very pleased with the ways it was handled. The staff's willingness to act mitigated the threats. Pupils' expressed great appreciation of the school's friendliness, facilities, food, teaching and extra-curricular activity.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Create a system of correction of written work which is clear to all pupils and gives them consistent indications of what to do to improve.
- Improve provision for pupils with special educational needs to make best use of resources.
- Make sure higher attainers do not underachieve in Years 7 to 9.

Sixth form:

- Broaden further the range of courses to cater for the full range of students now continuing in post-16 education.
- Do even more to improve A-level results in biology and ICT.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **good**, rapidly growing sixth form. Students achieve **very well** and teaching and learning are **very good**. Sixth formers play very important parts as members of the school and local communities. Standards have risen substantially since the previous inspection. The sharing arrangements with partner schools broaden opportunities increasingly well. The sixth form is **cost effective** against the school's budget and standards reached.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are well above average in A-level and vocational courses
- Teaching and learning and leadership are very good
- The range of non-A-level courses does not fully meet the needs of lower attainers
- Some students under-achieve in ICT and biology A-level examinations

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 literature	Very good: A-level results are consistently well above average. Teaching and learning are very good; they stimulate the students to read widely and engage in deep discussion and write interestingly about their studies. Leadership is very good.
Mathematics	Very good: This is a very successful subject; because of very good teaching and learning, students achieve well. In 2004, all passed the A-level examination, with half of the large entry obtaining high grades. Leadership is excellent.
Biology	Good: Students achieve well. A-level results are above average. Because of good teaching, students study and learn well. Not enough practice in writing answers at length means that they are not prepared adequately for some examination questions. Leadership is satisfactory.
German	Good: Students achieve well. AS results were above average in 2003 and those who went on to A-level did well in 2004. In response to good teaching, students in Year 12 learn and achieve well, although the range of resources used is too narrow. Leadership is good.
Design and technology	Good. A-level results for systems and control were below average in 2003. Since then product design has been introduced and results are now above average. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good. The subject is very well managed.
Information and communication technology	Good: A-level results in 2003 were well below average; they improved in 2004 with room for more progress. Standards are rising. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Achievement is good, leadership very good.
Geography	Good: All students achieve well and achieve a grade at A-level. Good teaching leads to rising standards year on year. The management is very good, leading to a successful team approach.
Business education	Excellent: Results are well above average and the courses provide a first-rate match to students' needs. Very good teaching enables students to achieve very well and to make excellent progress in developing personal qualities.
Health and social care	Very good: Examination results are above average because of very good teaching that leads to very good learning. The students' very positive attitudes help create good achievement so most students attain beyond what is predicted. Leadership is very 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 **very good** support, guidance and advice. Relationships between staff and students are very good and subject staff keep a close eye on how students are progressing, each lesson. There is an improved system of termly reviews where students meet with form tutors to check how they are getting on. Very good links with universities mean that staff are able to provide first hand guidance about courses.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is **very well led and managed**, by the acting head and newly returned head of sixth form. Strengths lie in teamwork; the continual drive to improve and the way students' views are sought and listened to. Leadership focused clearly on raising standards has tightened up systems for checking on students' progress which are more rigorous than before. Management strengths have improved careers guidance and enrichment programmes, as well as overseeing the move into a brand new building.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very positive about the sixth form. It is a particularly popular choice for students who choose it after completing their GCSEs elsewhere. They appreciate the support they get from staff and the friendly atmosphere. Some students felt the enrichment courses could be better. In fact, courses on offer for Year 12 students have been improved this year, and there is now a much wider selection on offer. Students feel the outdoor sports facilities need improving and the school agrees.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is **very good**; pupils leave with **well above average** standards in a very wide range of subjects. A dip in GCSE results in 2003 stirred the school to greater effort; those in 2004 were the best in its history. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is very good, as is that of the most able. Girls do better than do boys but by a smaller margin than that found nationally. Pupils from ethnic minorities achieve well when they receive extra help. Assistance for newcomers can be slow in arriving.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Strengths in English and mathematics allow pupils to achieve very well in the whole curriculum
- The 2004 GCSE results were the best in the school's history; they continue a clear upward trend since the previous inspection
- Pupils with special educational needs do very well in GCSE
- There is scope for some higher attainers to do even better in English, French and science

Commentary

1. Results of national tests for 11 year olds show pupils' standards in English, mathematics and science to be above average when they start Year 7; there are some variations, results are well above average in science, above average in mathematics and only just above average in English. At the same time, inspection evidence suggests standards in subjects such as history and geography to be no better than expected; in art, music and physical education they are below expectation. From these beginnings, pupils achieve very well over the five years of compulsory education; they obtain well above average results in GCSE.
2. The school sets itself very demanding National Curriculum test and GCSE targets; it has come very close to them in the last two years. Boys achieve slightly less well than do girls, but the margin between them is less than that found nationally. Pupils with English as an additional language achieve satisfactorily. Many do very well, but new non-English speaking arrivals struggle at first because they do not receive extra help quickly enough.
3. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9; work in lessons and scrutinies of written work show them to be operating at above expected levels in each of English, mathematics and science. Pupils' competence in English and mathematics is a great boon; they are able to handle other subjects from a position of some strength, so there is continuous good achievement.
4. Pupils have plenty of opportunity to improve their oral skills; they talk well. Reading and writing are above expectation and comprehension is good. Pupils are able to use graphs, to carry out different calculations, to measure accurately and to present data in a variety of forms at better than expected levels. Pupils use ICT increasingly well for research and presentation, so raising standards. However, higher attainers are, just occasionally, not pushed hard enough in, for example, French and English.
5. By the end of Year 9, very nearly nine-tenths of pupils reach at least the expected Level 5 in national tests in English, mathematics and science, which is well above average. The proportions reaching Level 6 or above are also well above average in mathematics and science, but are only just above in English. Pupils reach at least above expected standards in all other subjects of the National Curriculum by the end of Year 9. Their very good appetite for

learning helps, as does the very good quality of teaching that reflects the school's full adoption of a national strategy to raise achievement.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.7 (37.2)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	39.9 (37.8)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	35.6 (36.2)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 234 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

6. When compared with other schools, whose pupils had similar Year 7 attainment, the 2003 results were less flattering. Results in mathematics were above average, but below average in English and well below in science. After a long period of above average comparisons, the school, stung by these adverse ones, took some effective action. English results improved in 2004, as teachers taught higher attainers how to reach higher levels. They stayed above the previous average in mathematics, but went down a bit in science.
7. The school prepares pupils particularly well for continuing education, training or employment. Spurred by examination courses, often in subjects, academic or vocational, chosen for their immediate relevance, pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. The school's detailed systems for checking how well pupils are doing identify need and provide very effective extra help.
8. Since the previous inspection there has been a substantial rise in the proportions of pupils obtaining at least five GCSE higher grade, A*-C, passes. Below average comparisons with similar schools in 2003 brought an immediate response; the 2004 results were higher than any achieved beforehand in the school, with nearly three-quarters of candidates obtaining at least five GCSE higher grade, A*-C, passes.
9. Some of the best achievement continues to be in English and mathematics. Concentration on getting large numbers of pupils to a higher GCSE grade worked very well in 2004, with three-quarters of the year group obtaining such a pass in English and over two-thirds doing so in mathematics. Standards are above average and rising well in ICT.
10. The value added in 2003 was above average for 16 year olds; 2004 results and inspection evidence suggest it will be even higher this year.
11. The school is successful in bringing middle and lower attainers along, in line with the main principles of the national strategy. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is very good. In 2004, pupils who had received extra help averaged nine passes at GCSE. Those with the most severe difficulties when they entered the school averaged seven passes and far exceeded expectations. In the last three years, only five pupils have left with less than five GCSE passes.

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	66 (71)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	96 (96)

Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	41.2 (42.0)	34.8 (34.7)
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There were 230 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

12. In 2003, nearly all subjects recorded at least above average GCSE results. Slippage to just below average occurred in Spanish, physical education, religious education and combined science, but there are clear underlying reasons. The full year took religious education compared with much smaller samples nationally; more pupils took three sciences, with well above average results, so the overall calibre of those doing combined science went down; and staffing difficulties accounted for the Spanish results. Too many pupils failed to reach expected grades in physical education, but results in 2004 rose substantially, as they also did in religious education and modern foreign languages. Lesson observations and scrutinies of written work reinforce the likelihood of continuing improvement in results; they also show continuing very good achievement.
13. Pupils who attain very high standards or have particular talents achieve a very high proportion of grades at the top levels at GCSE. They benefit from opportunities for acceleration, such as a mathematics AS module in Year 11. They gain from opportunities to study separate sciences in Years 10 and 11 and benefit from appropriate challenge from almost all who teach them. Especially, they gain from the powerfully inclusive ethos of a school, which values all of its members. There are opportunities for visits and to meet visitors who seek to widen aspirations as well as to inform.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good achievement leads to well above average, rising standards
- Students' mature attitudes help them to become adept at finding things out for themselves
- Students' key skills and general education develop well
- Although improving, A-level ICT results are not high enough
- Too many students fail in biology A-levels

Commentary

14. Students' attainment on entry to the rapidly growing sixth form is about average. The school sets generous entry qualifications to post-16 courses, although there are too few courses specifically for lower attainers.
15. Despite a dip in 2003, there are substantial improvements since the previous inspection in A-level/VCE point scores; they are above average for both boys and girls. The school's reaction to the 2003 results demonstrated again its ambition to go on improving by meticulous self-analysis; the curative measures taken brought about a rise in average point scores in 2004 to an unprecedented level, above 300. Such a score represents very good achievement, which lesson observations and scrutiny of written work suggest is continuing.
16. In 2003, girls outperformed boys by a substantial margin, although in comparison with their gender nationally they were both above average. The improvement in results in 2004 shows clearly in a 6 per cent rise in higher grade, A/B, passes and a 10 per cent rise in A-E passes. Students do particularly well in English and mathematics, but there is a small tail of candidates who find mathematics too hard. An otherwise general absence of failures brought the biology and ICT results into sharp relief; one-quarter of the biology candidates failed and there were too many who did so in ICT. Previous weaknesses in design and technology have been overcome.

17. Results in vocational courses in 2003 were well above average in business studies and art and design and above average in health and social care – each of these the outcome of very good achievement over the course.
18. In 2004, half or more of the candidates entered obtained the highest A-B grades in art, systems technology, geography, history, English literature, English language, English language/literature, mathematics, physical education and religious education. This is an impressive list that amplifies very good achievement.
19. Recruitment to courses is good, although numbers selecting languages are small in A-level classes. Retention, after some shake-out at the start of Year 12, is good to AS-level. It is very good in Year 13 in both A-level and vocational courses.

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	98.6 (97.5)	97.7 (97.7)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	40.8 (46.0)	42.1 (40.8)
Average point score per pupil	283.4 (293.5)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 120 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

20. Students achieve so well because of the very good teaching and the similar learning that follows it. They have very good attitudes and appetites for learning, although the weaker results in biology and chemistry were because of poor attendance on the part of the few. The very strong guidance programme raises standards, as the school pays ever-closer attention to what the students are doing, at the same time as encouraging them to work things out for themselves. As a result, they are very well prepared for their next stages in education and training.
21. There is good provision for developing key skills among students who use ICT and library resources well to research and present their work. The personal, social and moral education course has a package of activities dedicated to developing key skills. Students work very well together. Their language and mathematical skills are above average and numerous students avail themselves of the chance to gain a basic skill in computer usage during their studies.

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

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **very good**. Attendance is **very good**. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils like being at school and work hard to achieve success
- Pupils behave very well in class
- The school successfully promotes very good attendance in all years

Commentary

22. The school provides an orderly and supportive environment for all. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and seldom stay away. They have a strong loyalty to the school and show great respect for their teachers. Pupils enjoy school life. In lessons they are often enthusiastic and respond very well to all challenges. They work very well with each other in class. During their time at school they learn to assume responsibility without fuss. They work well without

close supervision. Through such activities as group discussions, research assignments and presentations to the class they develop mature attitudes that serve them well in adult life. The school council offers further opportunities to develop social skills and awareness. The school library helps many pupils from all years to extend their individual interests and knowledge. Through regular challenging homework all pupils develop further their capacity for independent study. Hard working, the pupils are keen to succeed. Teachers are quick to celebrate the achievements of all pupils. This encourages pupils to take pride in themselves and in the school. The enthusiasm that they have for school may be measured by the high proportion actively involved in the wide range of activities held during lunchtime and after school.

23. The school has a clear behaviour policy that is understood by pupils. This policy reinforces very good behaviour throughout the school. Behaviour during lessons is particularly good. The overall level of exclusions is very low. The school in general has a calm and non-threatening atmosphere in which pupils learn and socialise comfortably. However, narrow, over-filled corridors can be threatening at lesson changeover times. Reported incidents of bullying and other forms of harassment are rare. Few pupils experience bullying, but those who do sometimes feel that more could be done to eliminate the problem. The school tackles promptly and effectively any problems that are reported.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year (2003-2004)

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1465	94	1

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

Attendance

24. Attendance rates are above the national average and unauthorised absence rates are much lower than average. Attendance has improved steadily in recent years, despite the growth in the school roll. Procedures for recording and checking pupils' attendance are clearly working well. Punctuality to lessons is very good for a school campus of this size. Almost all pupils arrive at school on time and lessons start promptly.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (2002/3)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.11	School data	0.17
National data	7.2	National data	1.8

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

25. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development provision is very good. That for spiritual development is outstanding. In lessons, there is a very strong contribution from religious education and personal social and health education but it is also strong in other subjects, such as art and English, where there is a strong focus on poetry and creative writing. The school chaplaincy also contributes enormously, organising prayer resources, liturgical activities, retreats and conferences. Assemblies and form tutor periods have carefully chosen themes and opportunities for prayer and reflection. There are regular masses for all year groups as

well as frequent voluntary masses. The school fulfils the statutory requirements for a daily act of worship.

26. Moral development is also outstanding. Many subjects deal with moral issues in the curriculum. For example, in English all the texts studied contain moral issues; in geography pupils discuss environmental concerns and in modern languages there are many opportunities for reflection and discussion. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong. They are aware of the schools' code of conduct and behaviour is very good. The chaplaincy again contributes well through a programme of community involvement, visiting speakers and assembly themes. There is involvement with outside organisations such as Amnesty International and a focus on issues such as fair trade with the third world.
27. Further reinforcing the governors' view that this is a true community school, provision for social development is very good. Heavy involvement with the community, through much charity and voluntary work, such as the impressive intergeneration history project, extends provision very well. There are very many other extra-curricular activities that include a programme of sports, dance and music. There are many opportunities for school trips and visits, for example through the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, although stopping exchanges abroad is a retrograde step in pupils' personal development. In lessons the pupils enjoy very good relationships; they socialise well, working collaboratively and helping each other. The school council is very active and gives the pupils first hand experience of what should occur in a democracy.
28. Cultural development is good. This is particularly so in relation to western culture. However, in many subjects, opportunities for the pupils to appreciate the richness of the traditions of other cultures are fewer. However, cultural development in art is outstanding. Pupils explore the art of other cultures such as Japanese, Indian and Aboriginal. Master classes, and visits to galleries and to exhibitions raise standards.

Sixth form

Students' attitudes and behaviour are **very good**. Attendance is **very good**. Personal development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' very mature attitudes help them to achieve very well
- Students concentrate and learn very well as a result
- Mutual respect helps students to gain academically and personally

Commentary

29. Students' mature attitudes show in mutual respect between them and teachers; students work hard as a result. They welcome the attention paid by teachers to their standards of work and act on the very good advice they receive. Intensive use of the library and other resources, such as the Internet, demonstrates the students' growing independence.
30. Very good attitudes show through the very good rates of both recruitment and retention on Year 12 and Year 13 courses; students feel fulfilled in their studies. In their questionnaire returns, students applauded the friendly atmosphere of co-operation with the staff. Attendance rates are now very good, although absences did affect science results in 2003.
31. Despite a thriving student council, numerous students felt they were not listened to and were treated more as children than young adults. Inspection evidence found no substance to these comments. Students were, for example, consulted about the move to new premises and about

their thoughts on the quality of teaching and learning. The school's listening ear and response can clearly be seen in the substantial expansion of available extra-curricular activity (a complaint in questionnaire returns), with 11 well-supported, extra interest pursuits provided weekly.

32. Provision for the students' personal development is very good; that for spiritual and moral development is outstanding. In addition to the timetabled personal, social and moral education programme, which takes place in Years 12 and 13, there are many other opportunities for spiritual and moral development. Students are well represented in the two assemblies each week and are involved in the work of the school chaplaincy. Sixth form students regularly take a leading role when voluntary liturgical services are organised. All Year 12 students take a general religious education course as part of their general studies programme; this gives them opportunities to explore and develop their faith.
33. Social development is very good. Students participate in the student council and are represented on the Diocesan Youth Council. The sixth form has set up a charities committee, which organises various fund-raising events for a range of charities. Through the enrichment programme the students are also highly involved in community work. Although the students' cultural development is good overall, too few opportunities occur for students to appreciate the richness of the traditions of other non-western cultures.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a **very good** quality of education. Pupils' very good achievement and similar attitudes are very closely related the **very good** quality of teaching that helps them to learn very well. Pupils benefit from a **good**, imaginative curriculum and those with special educational needs enjoy **good** provision. Care and guidance are also **very good**.

Teaching and learning

Teaching is **very good**. Learning is **very good**. Assessment is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning in English and mathematics are the keys to very good achievement
- An excellent training programme improves teaching and learning quality
- Enthusiastic teaching captivates the pupils who, in turn, are very keen to learn
- Pupils appreciate the way much of the teaching involves them closely in making decisions about what they are to learn and checking consistently how well they are doing
- Assessment that helps pupils get inside the mind of an examiner raises standards
- Marking of written work lacks consistency between subjects; this can confuse pupils
- Use of teaching assistants has significant strengths but has some weaknesses

Commentary

34. Teaching and learning are very good. The analysis table below illustrates the point very clearly. Inspectors' findings match pupils' and parents' perceptions. Subject commentaries in Part C of this report show a remarkable consistency of quality. Improvements since the previous inspection are substantial with, for example, now double the proportion of very good teaching.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 190 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
6 (3%)	89 (47%)	74 (39%)	21 (11%)	0	0	0

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

35. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9 and also in Years 10 and 11, where they are slightly better because the attention of teacher and pupil alike focuses on chosen examination courses, which are approached in lively, engaging ways that often make learning a joy. A very large, youthful staff who work particularly well as members of each departmental unit, and as a staff together, give great zest to teaching and learning throughout the school. Enthusiasm is an over-riding characteristic, but this is bridled by careful structure that makes sure the work is tailored to what will benefit the pupils most. As a result, lessons are relevant, for example in design and technology where they relate closely to real-life challenges.
36. The very good quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics builds effectively on the pupils' above average standards when they start as 11 year olds. It increases pupils' competence in literacy and numeracy very well, so they are able to cope more easily with other subjects. As a result, pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 in the numerous subjects in which their standards were no more than average when they started Year 7.
37. Numerous reasons account for the improvements in teaching and learning; a quest for excellence underpins everything. Leadership's confidence in giving talent full rein, in expecting the best from everyone and in setting up effective systems of accountability has a direct effect on teaching and learning. Arrangements for the evaluation of work in classrooms are very good.
38. Far-sighted partnerships with other schools, colleges and universities import and export quality. Outstanding provision for staff training is a good example of the benefits of such close associations. The whole teaching staff are now fully conversant with the details of the national strategy intended to improve the quality of learning and teaching; implementation is well advanced. Teachers organise their lessons to make sure the pupils are involved in what is happening, right from the start. In the best cases, they get the pupils to anticipate what is to be learned, basing it on what has gone before, so testing pupils' memory and understanding. Guidelines are set in all lessons; regular, frequent references to them help learning along. Detailed checks on what has been learned complete the lesson. Such practices are the norm, although the time kept at the end to check learning is occasionally too short to be of real value to teacher and pupils. Just occasionally, the work devised fails to stretch higher attainers enough in English and French.
39. Reasonable teaching loads, complemented by weekly, full-school training sessions, are paying off, as the staff have time to concentrate on improving teaching and learning. There is a head of steam that has a direct bearing on the quality of the pupils' learning experiences. Emphasis on getting the pupils to decide what constitutes success is spreading well into everyday practice. Lesson preparation is often highly imaginative, with the needs of the pupils uppermost. Pupils are involved; they are urged to discuss issues between themselves as well as reply to questions from the teacher. Lessons have good variety of activity and go along at a rapid rate. Teachers make good use of resources to help learning; of particular note are applications of a computer attached to a whiteboard that interacts directly with teacher and taught; it captivates the pupils who learn better as a result. Concentration spans are used to the full; lessons are very productive, leading to very good acquisition of skills and understanding, often reinforced at home. Although individual pupils felt homework was sometimes set without reason, inspectors found it made a good contribution to learning. A

reluctance to use ICT as a means of helping learning in class is found in art, history and modern foreign languages.

40. Assessment is good. It has very good features; the ways under-performing pupils are identified and given extra help are very effective. Pupils' performances in each subject are analysed closely and action taken where necessary. Books are marked regularly. Science, for example, has a particularly clear and easy-to-follow colour-coded system that identifies individual performances very well. However, marking lacks consistency between subjects, so messages to pupils differ. Also, the way in which correction helps pupils by telling how they might improve varies too much. It is very good in English, geography and history, but less so in science and other subjects.
41. The special needs co-ordinator manages a small team of learning support assistants who work mostly with pupils assessed as needing extra help. Other learning support assistants are less directly managed by the co-ordinator and are attached to subject departments who use them in a variety of helpful ways. This attachment has many benefits including the development of skills of working with teachers and pupils in different subjects. Evidence of the inspection indicates some disadvantages and inefficiencies, especially when supporting pupils with behavioural difficulties. Meetings of all support assistants have now been introduced which aim to assist the exchange of information and the sharing of best practice.

Sixth form

Teaching, learning and assessment are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning were very good in well over half of the observed lessons
- Teachers' very good understanding of and enthusiasm for the subjects they teach make students want to learn
- Students become adept at finding things out for themselves

Commentary

42. Teaching and learning continue the established pattern of Years 7 to 11; they are very good. Similar contributory factors apply: the quest for excellence, exemplary training, collaboration with partner institutions and careful checking on quality all exercise a strong influence on quality.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 56 lessons in the sixth form in the school

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1 (2%)	29 (52%)	23 (41%)	3 (5%)	0	0	0

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

43. Teaching in the sixth form is very effective in getting the students to work things out for themselves, using the library and ICT very effectively to help raise their standards; it is, however, weaker in German. The teaching gets students to generalise, reason and come to conclusions. Very good relationships with their teachers give students the confidence to research and to question, especially in subjects, for example mathematics, business studies and English, in which they do particularly well.

44. Enthusiasm and activities that keep students fully involved characterise teaching that leads to very good learning. Clear explanations of often-difficult ideas are the result of meticulous planning and teachers have time for the students who appreciate individual attention. In vocational courses, for example, such attention gets the students to think; teachers also set short-term targets so projects are carried out well. The very good feedback on how well students are doing is slightly better in the sixth form than in Years 7 to 11. Marking is very helpful in giving ideas on how to do even better and the dialogues between teachers and students also help them to achieve.

The curriculum

Curriculum provision is **good**. Enrichment is **very good**. Accommodation and resources are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum for pupils aged 11 to 16 has good breadth and relevance
- The curriculum is enriched by very close collaboration with partner providers
- Opportunities for learning outside lessons are very good
- Provision of vocational and work-related courses is good
- There are too few opportunities after Year 9 for participation in performing arts
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.

Commentary

45. Provision for Years 7 to 9 meets statutory requirements of the National Curriculum with an equitable distribution of time between subjects. Almost all pupils study two modern foreign languages and continue with at least one to GCSE. Classes contain pupils of mixed abilities though with a narrower range in mathematics and teachers show good awareness of different needs. Pupils with learning difficulties receive special help by being taught in smaller groups or individual support.
46. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are offered a broad and balanced curriculum with a good range of subjects leading to GCSE, GNVQ and other national qualifications. Very good innovation is apparent in the intergeneration project and the development of thinking skills, for example in geography. Pupils for whom a reduced programme of examination courses is appropriate can choose to receive extra help by studying one course fewer than do others. Very close collaboration with the local college of further education results in alternative practical courses run in vocational subjects. Part of the excellent liaison with other schools is shown, for example, in the current development of a BTEC course in physical education, as an appropriate alternative to GCSE for some students. Pupils receive good careers guidance about opportunities for future education, training and employment. Despite its many strengths, the curriculum has not provided pathways into further study in the sixth form for its lowest attainers despite their creditable performances at GCSE. The curriculum for Year 10 now includes improved provision for such students. There are no courses in dance or drama to GCSE, despite high standards and interest shown in Years 7 to 9.
47. Continuity in the curriculum benefits from the first-rate links the school has with local primary schools. All pupils are well prepared for entry and the school has very good information about individual health problems, learning difficulties and details of those with particular gifts and talents. The school follows the requirements and recommendations of the Code of Practice for monitoring and reviewing the progress of pupils with special educational needs. Parents and pupils are appropriately involved. Individual education plans for those at the higher stages of the register give good information to teachers but many of the targets set are too vague to guide teachers, to motivate pupils or to indicate how progress towards them is to be measured.

48. Those with learning difficulties requiring extra help benefit from teachers' understanding of their needs and from the help of learning support assistants. Wheelchair users and those with other disabilities have very good access to the curriculum because the school has appropriate facilities; it modifies equipment where needed and other pupils are supportive.
49. Very good opportunities for acceleration and enhancement of learning for the most able pupils are provided within subjects and through a good, broad range of school activities that develops their skills and raises achievement.
50. The school provides a very good range of opportunities outside lessons to improve the learning and enrich the experience of all its pupils. There are clubs to support learning in many subjects, and residential and day visits including visits to universities and trips abroad. There is an unusually high rate of participation in team and individual games and beneficial links with local sports and gymnastics clubs. Chances to take part in dance and drama are comparatively undeveloped.
51. The well-qualified, specialist teaching staff are very well matched to the needs of the curriculum. Support staff work well helping pupils meet their targets. Professional development is outstanding. It provides the basis on which the school and its partner schools improve teaching and learning. The school is a very good training ground for teachers and trainees.
52. Accommodation and resources are good; very good new building is seamlessly integrated. Some rooms for design and technology and science are too small, contrasting with excellent provision and use in mathematics. The accommodation for learning support makes no clear match of provision to need; the arrangement is not ideal for pupils who need the security of their own space. The ratio of computer equipment to pupils on roll is improving. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to greatly enhance pupils' learning. The well-stocked library, with additional computers for research and the sports hall provide very good curriculum enrichment throughout the day and after school.

Sixth form

Curriculum provision is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good range of examination courses
- Breadth and enrichment are good
- Low attaining pupils do not continue into the sixth form

Commentary

53. The curriculum offers a very good choice of courses leading to AS and A-levels and to advanced and intermediate vocational qualifications. Provision is made for the development of ICT and study skills.
54. In Year 12, one afternoon each week is given to a good enrichment programme designed to broaden interests and experience. Additional qualifications can be gained in photography, Spanish, Duke of Edinburgh Awards and sports leadership. Students have opportunities to participate in sports and musical performances.
55. Although the school aims to make suitable provision for pupils of all abilities, it does not attract its lowest attainers into the sixth form despite their creditable achievements in Year 11, but it is planning the introduction of GNVQ foundation level courses for them.

56. Students benefit from good advice on the next stage of their education or employment. Workshops and visits inform their decisions about applications to universities. Last year, students performed a pantomime for primary schools. Some work with disabled and underprivileged children in holiday times and undertake community service.

Care, guidance and support

The provision for pupils' care, welfare, and safety is **good**. They are provided with **very good** levels of support, advice and guidance. The school involves pupils **well** through seeking, valuing and acting on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and friendly, within the framework of a caring Christian community; they help to raise standards
- Numerous support systems are there for pupils who need someone to talk to
- Monitoring of pupils' academic progress is very good, with special programmes that enable pupils to do their best
- Systems to report bullying are not as high profile as they could be
- Well-understood procedures for health and safety are firmly established
- The efficiently operating school council has a distinct, positive effect on school life

Commentary

57. The school provides pupils with a very good level of care within a strong Christian framework. Relationships are friendly and supportive; they raise standards because they are catalysts to very good learning and achievement.
58. There are some very good support systems for pupils who have problems and need someone to talk to. For example, *learning mentors, a counsellor and the chaplain all play important parts in helping those who need a sympathetic ear; this is in addition to the very good pastoral support provided by form tutors and heads of year. Staff have a manageable teaching commitment so they are able to give quality time to the pupils in their care.
59. Monitoring of pupils' academic progress is very good. The school is vigilant and adapts well to the pupils' differing pastoral and learning needs. Special support groups, for instance, are part of a range of measures that effectively help pupils to achieve better results than originally predicted.
60. A very few pupils expressed reservations about bullying in the school. These worries were refuted by most who felt it was not a concern. Inspectors were very happy that anyone who seeks help gets it, and that bullying is not a big issue in the school, although mass movement along quite narrow corridors is intimidating for smaller pupils. However, ways for pupils to get help overcoming bullying are not publicised and there are few avenues for those who want to ask for help anonymously. Bullying on the buses was a concern for a few, as well; this is a matter for open future discussion.
61. The active council is an important part of school life. Councillors have been instrumental in engineering several improvements and are currently campaigning to see an improvement in the quality of school food, so that it is healthier and more fairly priced, in their view. Staff often consult pupils on different issues, for example, by a recent end-of-term survey on pastoral care quality.
62. Health and safety systems are firmly established and child protection awareness is good.

**A learning mentor is someone who is trained to help pupils overcome problems preventing them from learning properly. These posts are funded through the school's involvement with the Excellence in Cities initiative.*

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sixth formers' work comes under very close scrutiny for the duration of their courses
- Very good support raises standards

Commentary

63. Students receive very good advice, support, and guidance about their work from subject teachers, form tutors, and the head of sixth form. They also benefit from the services of a learning mentor whose role is specific to sixth form students. She provides an especially useful link for those wishing to move to higher education. Systems for monitoring students' progress have been improved over the last year. Progress reviews are conducted formally each term and informally at other times, largely because teachers and students benefit from very good relationships.
64. Sixth formers were frequently consulted when they moved into their new building, and made many of their own decisions about how the common room was to be furnished. Sixth form fund-raising and decision-making councils operate efficiently.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The partnership with parents is **good**. The school's work with the community and educational establishments is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school makes an outstanding contribution towards furthering others' educational development
- Community links are extensive and the school has a deservedly high reputation in the area
- Parents are very supportive of the school and relationships are positive and friendly

Commentary

65. The partnership with parents is good and school places are sought after. Relationships between staff and parents are positive and friendly; staff pride themselves on getting back, on the same day, to any parents who 'phone. The school is particularly good at working with parents when there are areas of concern about their child's performance. The very high number of largely supportive replies to the Ofsted questionnaire is testimony to the strength of positive feeling parents have about the school.
66. It is in the school's relationships with the wider community where real excellence lies. Having justifiably earned several accolades – training school, specialist Mathematics and Computing College and 'Leading Edge', the school helps to improve practice and learns from others in the wider educational world. It does this exceptionally well; as a partner in the Leading Edge arrangement, assistance from the English department, for example, led to a very substantial rise in higher grade GCSEs in its fellow school in 2004.

67. Inspectors who met with numerous educational and community partners were overwhelmed by the strength of positive feeling for the work undertaken and the contribution the school is making to improving education in the area. There is an open door here for all schools to use the staff expertise and a very clear understanding that the teaching and learning partnership is two-way. The fact that the local secondary school cluster has made a significant financial commitment to working in co-operation is testimony to partnership and mutual commitment to raising standards.
68. The influence of the network spreads widely. In the community, for example, the nationally acclaimed intergeneration project, where pupils work with local senior citizens, has seen (amongst many other things) the production of a DVD on the history of Tyneside shipyard communities.
69. Work with other schools is also first rate. Primary schools benefit substantially, for example, as specially allocated mathematics staff liaise weekly, and language teachers visit to teach French and help staff. These initiatives and many more like them are hugely beneficial for staff and pupils and are a key ingredient in the very good quality of provision in the school.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Information for parents is good
- The sixth form is a very popular choice for parents and students from other schools
- There are excellent links with other educational establishments, particularly local universities

Commentary

70. There are good links with parents of sixth formers. Parents receive regular progress reports and chances to meet with staff to discuss progress. In addition, staff are always at the end of the telephone and generally make a point of getting back to parents the same day. The sixth form is a very popular choice in the area for parents and students from other schools and colleges. Numbers joining this year are at an all-time high.
71. The school excels in the relationships it has with other educational establishments, particularly colleges and universities; this means teachers can provide students with first-hand information about the suitability of courses. A senior member of staff has 'guest lecturer' status at a major northern university and there are some strong links through departments, especially in mathematics.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership by headteacher guides the school's continuous quest for improvement
- Inter-dependent accountability among a reinvigorated, expanded leadership team is producing some first-rate developmental work
- The school is outstandingly successful in giving its staff time to do its work and to train to improve its performance, which it is doing
- Other educational partners share the vision for improving education
- The school has a very clear agenda for further improvements
- Governors debate passionately the school's provision; they take great pride in its successes
- Continuous staff training is exemplary; it raises standards

Commentary

72. This school continues to prosper since very challenging beginnings on amalgamation several years ago. Improvements since the previous inspection are very good. The school is outstandingly well led by a headteacher who shares his passion and vision successfully with everyone. His assertion that 'education has very few glass ceilings' encapsulates his beliefs. He is an excellent role model for others to aspire to. The varied leadership roles he has undertaken in and beyond the local education authority are testimony to his respected reputation locally.
73. The teamwork, dynamism and pride in the school, from a staff, many of whom are new to the profession, are overwhelming. The headteacher's priority is to provide time, resources and encouragement, enabling staff to believe in what they are doing and thus do the job well. This is one secret to the school's success, which has seen GCSE results rise to an all-time high in 2004. The school has a deservedly high reputation in the community; despite considerable growth, it remains greatly over-subscribed.
74. The headteacher is a strong believer in allowing staff the chance to develop their own initiatives. A policy of inter-dependent accountability consistently reinvigorates the senior leadership team. Its members' enthusiasm, hard work and love of what they are doing, mean their individual projects, all connected to improving teaching and learning, take the school consistently forward. Delegation works at every level and gets the best out of everyone. Even those who are new to teaching are given responsibilities to which they rise magnificently.
75. The school's commitment to providing professional development opportunities is outstanding, befitting its status as a training school. Senior managers and heads of department instigate a raft of almost daily opportunities for self-improvement, which are extremely well supported. Many staff have dual roles as educational consultants working in a range of specialised areas in and beyond a school that is at the forefront of educational thinking. It takes its responsibilities for working with and learning from other educational partners most seriously.
76. The school manages staff recruitment, deployment and training all extremely well. Its established role at the cutting edge of innovation and collaboration helps attract staff keen to join in. Very close links within higher education establishments mean it is also in an enviable position when it comes to recruiting newly qualified staff. Imaginative use is made of skilled non-teaching staff (often people interested in becoming teachers) within departments to free teachers from administrative tasks.
77. The quality of leadership of heads of department is very good. It is characterised by strong teamwork, shared commitment, and an open analytical approach to continuous improvement. It is a testimony to their leadership strengths that some staff deliver 'Aspiring Heads of Department' programmes to participants from other schools.
78. Governors provide very good support and know what they view as a real community school well. The very recently retired chair of governors' strong partnership with the headteacher is key. Their deep philosophical accord on what a denominational school should aspire to be has produced a gem. All governors play an active role; for instance they have recently successfully helped oversee a major building project. They have a deep-rooted affinity with the school that leads to a genuine feeling of ownership and they share in the vision that motivates and inspires everyone.
79. The school's influence in improving the education of young people, both in the local area and nationally, is exemplary. Numerous richly-deserved accolades, awards, and national tokens of recognition are testimony to that influence. The school operates as a mini 'education authority'

and is highly respected by, and works hand in glove with, the LEA, other schools, colleges, and universities.

80. The school's excellent commitments to professional development, extensive work with other educational partners and its exemplary leadership are all positive aids to raising achievement. Inadequacies in the accommodation for science are barriers to learning in that department.
81. Finances are managed very well. A recent investment in a major building programme has provided high quality accommodation for teaching and learning. The deputy headteacher, with the headteacher and governors, monitors the budget very closely. Economy of purchasing scale means that resources are not penalised by the policy of committing a larger than usual amount of money to pay for staffing. This gives staff more time outside lessons for developmental work and planning: a real strength that more than justifies the Investors in People award and a major reason behind very good quality teaching and learning. Considering the below average income per pupil combined with the very good quality of education provided, the school provides excellent value for money. The sixth form is cost effective against the school's budget.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4,697,993
Total expenditure	4,717,993
Expenditure per pupil	3, 243

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	80,000
Balance carried forward to the next	60,000

Leadership in the sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership has overseen a rise in standards this year
- Management is very good and has refined and improved systems over the last year
- Sixth formers appreciate the support they receive from teachers and are generally happy with the provision

Commentary

82. The sixth form is very well led. The acting head of sixth form, together with the newly returned head of sixth, make a very strong team, in common with other leaders in the school.
83. Strengths lie in teamwork, monitoring of provision in order continually to refine and develop what is on offer, and consultation with students. The leadership's strong relationship with other post-16 providers in the area means that students benefit from the availability of shared courses, for example in philosophy. Students are positive about the way the sixth form is run. It does indeed run smoothly on a day-to-day basis because procedures and policies are clear and carefully thought through.
84. Relationships are very good and there is a high level of support between students and staff. The sixth form questionnaire identified concerns over a lack of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Comments were made to inspectors regarding not enough advice and support for those seeking alternatives to higher education. In fact, management systems had already identified the need to boost the extra-curricular enrichment programme and there is now a very good choice of activities of offer. In addition, the careers programme is being improved to incorporate a new programme of guidance for non-university students.

85. Clear leadership focused on raising standards has also set up much more rigorous systems for checking on students' progress than at the time of the previous inspection. There is not a strong link between sixth formers and younger pupils because of timetable restrictions; this means they cannot provide the friendship and support for younger ones so often seen, which is a shame. Students do raise considerable sums of money for others, channelled through the work of their charity committee.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning

The effectiveness of the school's provision for work-related learning (WRL) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Arrangements for work experience are good
- Teaching and learning are good in vocational courses
- The curriculum provides many good opportunities to develop skills related to employability

Commentary

86. Provision meets statutory requirements. This judgement is based on: discussions with staff who have responsibilities in this area; discussions with pupils; a study of pupils' work experience placements; and evidence on WRL from a sample of lessons in vocational and other subjects of the curriculum.
87. Arrangements to ensure that all pupils in Year 10 benefit from work experience are good. Pupils are thoroughly prepared and de-briefed; placements meet their needs and interests. Work experience is limited to one week. In their careers lessons, pupils have good opportunities to learn about work and to develop the personal skills they need for work. A good range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 meets the needs of different groups of pupils: courses are run in leisure and tourism, health and social care, ICT, and engineering, as well as a vocational course in physical education. There is also provision for a small group of disaffected pupils in a vocational studies programme. The sample of lessons seen in vocational subjects indicates that teaching and learning are good and that these courses are successful in raising pupils' achievement. There are many opportunities across other subjects of the curriculum for pupils to develop a range of skills needed for work and employability, such as collaborative working, decision making, communication, numeracy and ICT skills. However, there has been no formal audit of these subjects' contributions to WRL to evaluate cohesion in pupils' learning. There are few opportunities as yet in the enrichment programme for promoting work-related learning, but positive links with employers form part of the excellent provision the school has with the community. A WRL co-ordinator has been appointed and responsibilities for careers and work experience are clearly allocated. There is as yet no formal plan for WRL across the curriculum. Performance in vocational courses is monitored and evaluated and appropriate changes in provision have been made in response to these evaluations. Work experience placements are also monitored and evaluated effectively. Further development of vocational courses has been identified as an area for development by the school.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 pupils make very rapid progress and achieve well above average GCSE results
- Pupils make slower progress in Years 7 to 9; not all lessons centre on what they should learn
- Very good teaching overall ensures that pupils enjoy lessons and learn very well
- Very good leadership and management help to raise the standards of all pupils' work
- Very good improvement has taken place since the previous inspection

Commentary

88. Pupils achieve very well. By Year 11 their work is much further ahead of the average than when they joined the school. Their best progress is in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average compared with those in all schools. Results in 2004 appear even better because teaching improved still further. In both years the proportion of pupils obtaining the highest grades was twice the national average. Boys achieved particularly well and all pupils did better in English than they did on average in other subjects. Almost all pupils were entered for GCSE examinations and they all achieved at least grade G.
89. Year 10 and 11 pupils also display well above average standards in their work. Pupils talk readily and appropriately in most situations. They read challenging literary and media texts and write about them perceptively. Essays are well argued on the basis of well-selected and detailed evidence. Pupils show in their writing that they are sensitive to poetic language. Standards of presentation and accuracy are high. The work of pupils with special educational needs is well above average, too.
90. Up to Year 9, pupils achieve well but do not make quite the rapid progress they make in Years 10 to 13. National test results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above average. However, higher attaining pupils under-achieved and results were well below those in similar schools. In 2004 results appear to have improved because teachers have made sure that pupils know how to hit the higher levels.
91. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 show above average standards in their work. Pupils are keen to answer questions in class and talk freely in small groups. They read aloud with good expression and understanding. Many use the library regularly for research and personal reading. Pupils write fluently and accurately. Their written work is always very well organised and presented.
92. Teaching and learning are very good. They are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good thereafter. Just occasionally, in Years 7 to 9, teachers repeat tasks rather than extending them so learning loses pace and challenge. Apart from such instances, teachers ensure that pupils have clear guidelines for success. As a result, they work purposefully with specific targets in mind. Lessons move along at a brisk pace. Teachers ensure that all pupils learn very well by contributing actively to lessons. In a very good Year 11 lesson, groups of pupils analysed two characters from John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Each group's findings were used by all pupils to write their own paragraphs. Pupils enjoyed this extra challenge and learned very well

Teachers work hard to improve pupils' language and literacy skills; as a result, these skills are above average. Marking is consistently detailed and shows pupils how to improve their work. They also learn where they stand against national standards.

93. The department is very well led. This has contributed greatly to the substantial improvement since the previous inspection. Strong teamwork, sensible delegation of responsibilities and relentless focus on ways to improve teaching and learning characterise this department. Assessment is tightly organised. New teachers have continual support. Very good leadership spreads beyond the classroom and is evident in the range of extra activities available to pupils. The impact also extends to other schools in the local cluster that have benefited from exported expertise.
94. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards for pupils in Years 10 and 11 have improved. Pupils now achieve better results overall than they did then. Teaching and learning are substantially better. Leadership and management have also improved.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

95. Standards are good and support for improving literacy is good across the school. In most lessons pupils are encouraged to talk about their work to help them develop oral skills. They also develop their confidence to read aloud in subjects such as English, science and geography. Correct spelling of technical vocabulary is a strong focus in physical education, ICT and design and technology. Many departments guide pupils in writing at length in an organised way. Teachers in science are keen to give pupils opportunities for creative writing. Good work in ICT lessons on different types of questions helps pupils to use language well. The library is well stocked and comfortable. Many pupils use it regularly to extend and develop their reading interests.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern foreign languages is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Almost all pupils study two foreign languages in Years 8 and 9
- In Years 10 and 11, pupils reach above average standards and achieve very well
- In Year 9, abler pupils are insufficiently challenged in French
- Boys respond well in lessons and their GCSE results are improving
- Pupils are highly motivated in Spanish and German lessons; they make rapid progress
- Too little homework is set in Years 10 and 11

Commentary

96. In 2003, GCSE results in modern foreign languages were average overall. The proportion of A*-A, grade passes was above average and girls generally achieved better results than did the boys. These results were lower than those of previous years. Unvalidated data for 2004 shows above average results, with a significant improvement in boys' performance. Staffing difficulties and syllabus changes contributed to the lower results in 2003.
97. Teaching and learning are very good overall. They are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good thereafter. Almost half the lessons seen were very good. Teachers use the foreign language fluently and enthusiastically in lessons; they plan their work very well, with high expectations, clear learning objectives and high quality resources.

98. In Years 7 to 9, all pupils learn French and from Year 8, almost all start either German or Spanish as an alternating second foreign language. By the end of Year 9, standards are above expectations overall and achievement is good. In Spanish and German pupils make particularly rapid progress; in Year 7 French, teachers' high expectations in spelling, grammar and sentence structure contribute effectively to pupils' literacy; lower ability pupils and those with special educational needs make very good progress. However, abler pupils in French in Year 9 are insufficiently challenged, making only satisfactory progress. In all three languages, pupils develop very good listening and reading skills. In writing, standards vary. Pupils write confidently in Spanish and German, but in French, writing does not always help to fix what has been learned in class thoroughly enough in pupils' minds, so some have difficulties recalling language they have learned.
99. In Years 10 and 11, pupils generally make rapid progress, owing to the teachers' high expectations and clear focus on examination outcomes. Pupils' achievement in Year 11 is very good; the ablest pupils reach well above average standards in French, German and Spanish. In an excellent Year 11 Spanish lesson, pupils, especially boys, spoke confidently about the environment, speaking with very good Spanish accents. In all years, pupils' speaking is mainly confident, despite the lack of foreign languages assistants who provide authentic models. In Years 10 and 11 pupils do not have enough homework. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning; boys respond enthusiastically in lessons, showing in their improving performance. Pupils' use of ICT is underdeveloped.
100. Assessment is very good, with pupils regularly involved in assessing themselves and their classmates. However, in Years 7 to 9, National Curriculum levels are not used routinely as a measure of pupils' progress.
101. Leadership is very good; the head of department is an excellent professional role model whose clear vision and high aspirations inspire the expert, committed team. Departmental organisation is very good, although schemes of work for Year 9 French are a bit out of date. Improvement since the previous inspection is good; teaching quality, achievement of lower attaining pupils and of boys, have both improved. Use of ICT still requires attention.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are excellent; they underpin high quality learning for all pupils
- Examination and test results are well above the national averages
- The provision of resources to match teaching needs is excellent, enriching pupils' learning
- Teaching is very good and engages pupils very well in their learning
- Marking of pupils' work does not provide comments on how they can improve

Commentary

102. Year 9 tests, in 2004, showed continuation of the well above average standards of recent years, indicating good achievement by pupils. The 2002 and 2003 test results were well above those of similar schools. The attainment of girls in 2003 was better than that of boys. Low attaining pupils made very good progress. Results were below those in English but above those in science. In 2004, Year 11 GCSE results were above those of 2003 when they were well above the national average. This represents good achievement by pupils.
103. Currently, achievement in lessons is good. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average for each ability group. This represents good progress for pupils when compared to

their attainment on entry to Year 7. By the end of Year 11, pupils are also attaining increasingly well above average standards and achieving very well. The most able pupils are given opportunities to enter for an AS module qualification, studying in lessons after school. The quality of work seen reflects pupils' very good attitudes to learning. Clear presentation with suitable mathematical methodology aids pupils' development of understanding. There is no difference in the achievement of pupils from different ethnic or social backgrounds. All those with different, challenging learning needs and low attaining pupils are achieving very well and have already gained grades in GCSE modules studied so far.

104. Teaching is very good. Enthusiastic teachers use a wide variety of teaching styles and interactive whiteboards to develop pupils' interest and participation in their learning. Excellent subject knowledge enables teachers to plan lessons that encourage pupils to work at a challenging pace, resulting in very good learning. Where teaching was excellent, pace and content were perfectly matched to the very high ability of the group. Lessons contain clarity in the development of new ideas and pupils display interest and self-confidence in their learning. Very effective learning support ensures that pupils with special needs benefit fully from their lessons. Assessment during lessons is very effective and teachers respond rapidly to pupils' difficulties. The marking of pupils' work is accurate and regular but there are no comments on what to do to improve; this is a weakness.
105. Leadership and management are excellent. Clarity of vision, creating a very effective team of teachers and providing them with excellent resources with which to work, has ensured very good support for pupils. The curriculum provides opportunities for all pupils to attain to their full. The ethos of the department is one of 'love of mathematics' and a wish to do the best possible. The department stands as a model for others to emulate and is at the leading edge of subject and training developments in the area. The high quality of this department fully supports the school's status as a 'specialist Mathematics and Computing College'.
106. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. All the issues raised have been tackled successfully. The use of ICT as a teaching tool and the implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy have improved the quality of teaching.

Mathematics across the curriculum

107. Pupils' mathematical skills are well above those expected nationally; they support their learning well in other subjects. In science, teachers contribute positively to pupils' skills in the use of graphs and a wide variety of calculations. During design and technology and textiles lessons, teachers develop pupils' accuracy in measuring and graphical presentation. In geography and history, pupils develop their graphic skills very well when presenting data in a variety of forms. There has been whole-school training in the development of pupils' numeracy across the curriculum. There is very good development as all members of the mathematics department are linked to other subjects to lend support and advice on the use of mathematics across the curriculum.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department is managed very well by an excellent leader
- Results in national tests and examinations are consistently above average
- Good teaching throughout means pupils learn well
- There is considerable focus on developing pupils' literacy and mathematical skills
- The department is developing very good systems for tracking pupils' progress

- Laboratory provision has weaknesses; it affects some learning adversely

Commentary

108. Pupils make good progress and achieve well up to the end of Year 9. Prior to 2003, results at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average but they dropped slightly to above average in that year. In relation to similar schools these results were, however, well below average with girls attaining slightly better than boys. The percentage of pupils attaining average grades was just below the target set by the school. In 2004 results were very similar. Work seen in lessons and in books supports these results as most pupils are attaining levels higher than expected at this stage of the year. For instance, Year 8 pupils could explain the way in which the earth's crust moved to form different continents whilst a lower set of Year 7 pupils were measuring length with considerable accuracy. An imaginative new course, developed in school, has a variety of activities and resources at different levels to help all pupils, including those with special needs, to achieve well.
109. Most pupils achieve satisfactorily at GCSE. Since the previous inspection, results for double award science improved each year up to 2002, rising to above average over three years. In 2003, these results fell for the first time because two groups took three separate sciences instead. In the three sciences, girls' results at the higher grades, A*-C, were significantly above national standards. No pupil has failed to obtain at least a pass grade in the last two years. Standards seen in class reflect examination results with many pupils reaching above average standards; this includes the pupils in the triple science groups and those identified as gifted scientists.
110. Teaching is good. It is very good in Years 7 to 9, where particular emphasis on improvement is taking effect. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly. They always share with pupils what the lesson will contain, very often checking progress at the end. In the best lessons pupils are kept fully involved in learning because of many stimulating and challenging activities such as experiments, simulation activities or using computer programs to check learning. In Years 10 and 11, the work is sometimes not put together well enough to let the pupils see how each part relates to the next. The department now uses its own easy-to-follow colour-coded system for tracking pupils' progress across a year; it identifies any pupil below target who is then given extra help. All teachers mark pupils' work regularly, but there is inconsistency in the detail given, particularly on how pupils can improve. In a few lessons, planning was over-ambitious or not structured sufficiently to allow pupils to learn well from one stage to the next.
111. Because teachers set such high expectations of application, behaviour and achievement, lessons are purposeful, pupils want to succeed and good learning takes place. Pupils work very well together during practical activities, when sharing ideas or checking each other's work. Most take extreme care; written work is usually neatly presented and completed in both boys' and girls' books. The skills of writing are developed well and there are many opportunities for pupils to learn the meaning and correct spellings of new scientific terms. Extension of pupils' mathematical competence is also good.
112. Leadership is excellent. The recently appointed head of department has a very clear view of future development and is very well supported by a large team of specialists, many of whom are relatively new to the profession. Staff work particularly well together, sharing resources and ideas; there is a lively, youthful approach to the department's work. The technician team works tirelessly to assist the staff, despite some shortcomings in accommodation. The work of the department is carefully monitored and the annual plan indicates future developments very clearly. The department is well resourced, including much of the latest technology. While all laboratories were refurbished recently, several are too small, so learning opportunities are curtailed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good
- Pupils have very good attitudes and are interested in the subject
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good
- Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement by pupils
- There is insufficient use of National Curriculum levels in teaching in Years 7 to 9 to help pupils understand how to improve their standards
- Year 11 pupils not taking a GCSE ICT course do not have their ICT capabilities assessed: this is a weakness

Commentary

113. In 2004, standards were above average at the end of Year 9. GCSE courses were only introduced in 2003, so there are no results for 2004.
114. Achievement is good. Pupils arrive in the school with a wide range of experiences in ICT, but with above average standards in work that requires literacy skills and presentation. They achieve well so that by the end of Year 9 they reach the levels above those expected for pupils of this age. There is also good achievement by the end of Year 11 by those taking GCSE and GNVQ courses. They produce work in line with national expectations even though they have had limited experience of using spreadsheets and databases earlier in the school. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well owing to good support from teaching assistants. Pupils not involved in examination courses also achieve well; see paragraph 118.
115. In Years 7 and 8 pupils learn how to use different software programs, such as word processing, or presenting slide shows, as they compile quizzes about safety in using the Internet. In Year 9, pupils are beginning to use a range of required skills, for example in the production of sophisticated logos. In Year 11, pupils have completed their first project for the course; they make extensive use of software to create brochures, leaflets and websites.
116. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a very good understanding of their subject; they give very good explanations on the use of software, so pupils make good progress. However, in some lessons lower attaining pupils are not given sufficient help in the use of graphics software. Lessons are well planned and prepared with work set matching pupils' capabilities. Good use is made of booklets prepared by the department to help pupils learn more about the subject. Three-part lessons are well established, although the plenary sessions are sometimes too rushed. Pupils have very good attitudes in lessons, and their work rates contribute to their good progress.
117. The subject is very well led and managed. Staffing is very good, with a core team of well-qualified teachers, a network manager, a technician and a teaching assistant, who helps pupils well both in the school and in partner primary schools. Monitoring of teaching is well planned to ensure that standards are raised. There has been good progress since the previous inspection, with improved standards and the introduction of GCSE and GNVQ courses.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

118. Pupils have good levels of knowledge and understanding, so they use their ICT skills effectively in many subjects. Most departments have planned use of ICT in their schemes of

work. Teachers make very effective use of interactive whiteboards. Pupils make particularly good use of interactive whiteboards and laptop computers in mathematics. In science, pupils increase their knowledge of the subject through data logging and various sensors, as well as laptops. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 taking a GCSE course make good use of specialist software to compose music. Less use is made of ICT in art, history and modern foreign languages. Regular training sessions help teachers in the use of new hardware and software, and the increased use of ICT since the previous inspection shows that good progress has been made since then.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads to good achievement
- Teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and the planning of lessons raise standards
- Teacher's commitment to and enthusiasm for the subject are infectious
- Fieldwork enhances what is taught in the classroom
- Assessment is used well to show how well pupils are doing and how they can improve

Commentary

119. Overall standards are above national averages. In 2003 the proportion of A*-C higher grades at GCSE was above national averages. A small dip in 2004 should be set against a background of rising results. Girls' results are marginally higher than those of boys.
120. In the work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Year 9 were above national expectations. Pupils write well on what they experience during lessons. There is evidence of good use of maps, diagrams and graphs, and pupils' skills in using computers are developing well. Pupils of all abilities demonstrate a good understanding of the impact geographical processes have on the environment. They have confident mapping skills, coming, for example, to a good understanding of the changes brought to a town by tourism.
121. In lessons, pupils work at above national standards by the end of Year 11. They make good progress in their geographic knowledge, understanding and use of geographic skills. Pupils of all abilities progressed well in their understanding of a case study of squatters in Kenya. Pupils listen attentively and use their thinking skills to advantage in lessons. Writing and presentation skills continue to improve over time. The emphasis on the use of key words in all lessons has a considerable positive effect.
122. Both boys' and girls' achievements relative to their prior attainment on entry are good throughout. Pupils with special educational needs do well; they benefit substantially from extra help by teachers and learning assistants to achieve their targets. The gifted and talented achieve particularly well because of the extra work they do.
123. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and so are the wider aspects of assessment for learning, monitoring and marking. Teachers plan their lessons well and share with pupils what is to be the focus of each lesson. They draw on a good range of resources to provide activities to stimulate thinking and interest to help pupils' learning. Skilful questioning and good oral assessment help many pupils understand and most are fully involved in lessons. The very

good use of an interactive whiteboard in lessons has brought a new dimension to the teaching and new levels of participation; this is raising achievement. Pupils rise to the high levels of expectation and they readily grasp the opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. Marking is regular with useful comments. Pupils' work often shows that they have accepted the advice on how to improve their work.

124. Subject management is very good. The head of department has a very clear vision for progress. Schemes of work have been reviewed and the use of fieldwork extends what is learnt in the classroom. Monitoring of how the department operates is effective. The development plan shows a clear strategy for improvement with many points addressed. Accommodation is very good and there are very good displays in classrooms celebrating pupils' achievement. The subject has dealt with the key issues mentioned in the previous inspection and is making good progress.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads to very good learning and achievement by pupils
- Examination results have been consistently well above average
- Very good leadership and management of a very effective team of teachers raise standards
- Some very good curriculum development raises pupils' achievement
- Insufficient use of ICT in lessons is a relative weakness

Commentary

125. Teaching and learning are both very good throughout the main school. Lessons are consistently well planned with clear objectives, which pupils understand. Teachers have a very good command of the subject; they present it very effectively, using language, which pupils understand. Teachers are positive and encouraging and they get the best from their pupils. Work is very well matched to the needs of pupils, particularly those with special educational needs. Teachers often use imaginative methods to stimulate pupils' interest and engage them. As a result, pupils are well motivated. Teachers have consistently high expectations, so pupils work hard and behave very well in lessons. The skills for GCSE examination successes are taught very systematically. Teachers mark pupils' work very regularly and thoroughly. Pupils, therefore, have a clear understanding of their performance and progress and of how to improve. Pupils' attitudes are positive, indeed very positive in Years 10 and 11.
126. Teachers exploit ICT effectively in presenting their material and pupils use it regularly for homework; it is, however, very rarely used to help learning in class.
127. Achievement is very good. By Year 9, standards are above average and pupils' achievement is good, coming from a no more than average level when they started as 11 year olds. Their structured writing is very good. Pupils' knowledge and understanding, including their understanding of different interpretations of history, are above expectation. At this level, pupils' skills of evaluating historical sources are not as well developed.
128. Examination results have been consistently well above average until 2003. In 2003, results were above average but the proportion of pupils obtaining the highest grades was well above average. Boys performed almost as well as girls, the difference between them much narrower than the national one. In 2004, results showed a substantial improvement on 2003. By Year 11, standards in work seen are also well above average and pupils' achievement is very good. Pupils' structured writing is again very good; pupils make rapid progress in developing their

writing skills over the GCSE course because they have very regular practice. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are well above average; their skills of using and evaluating historical sources are above average.

129. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department provides very good leadership in developing the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning. The department is an extremely effective team. There are secure systems for monitoring and evaluating performance and taking appropriate action.
130. The department's remarkably innovative intergeneration learning project, drawing on first-hand contributions from members of the public, is highly effective in raising achievement and self-esteem for those pupils taking part, most of whom are pupils with special educational needs. There are also very good opportunities for pupils identified as gifted and talented to demonstrate very high achievement. There are, however, very limited opportunities in the history curriculum for pupils to study non-European cultures.
131. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. At that time, the department received a good report. Since then, the overall quality of teaching, learning and leadership has improved.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is very good and standards are well above average by Year 11
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good
- Pupils have very good attitudes to learning and work hard in lessons
- Leadership of the department is good overall
- Management of the department is inefficient

Commentary

132. Standards are above average in Years 7 to 9, as they have been in recent years. Pupils achieve very well. They use the design process effectively to design and make products in all materials areas. Because the teaching of theory is successfully built into practical work, pupils have a good knowledge of the materials they use in resistant materials, food and textiles lessons. Standards are average overall in electronics, although higher attaining pupils have very good understanding of components and their function within systems. Lower attaining pupils are unsure of the principles of the work.
133. Standards are well above average by Year 11. GCSE results for pupils obtaining higher grades, A*-C, were well above average in 2003. Standards are particularly high in graphic products and food technology and higher than usual in electronics and resistant materials. Pupils achieve very well. They have very good knowledge of materials and produce high quality products in practical lessons. Boys and girls achieve similar standards and most pupils achieve well above expectation based on prior attainment and assessed ability. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well because work is carefully planned to suit them. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning and are confident in working independently and creatively. They use computers confidently to present their work and for designing and making activities. Pupils reached average standards and showed sound understanding of design principles in an engineering lesson.

134. The quality of teaching is very good overall. Teachers have very good understanding of individual pupils and how they learn best; they adapt their lessons accordingly. They have very good subject knowledge and are very well informed about requirements of examination work, so that learning in lessons is highly focused. There are not always enough opportunities for writing at length to challenge the most able pupils. Learning is well related to the world of work through consideration of industrial practice and use of materials.
135. Leadership is good and is very well focused on continuing to raise standards through evaluation of the work of different materials areas. Teachers work exceptionally well together but as two separate teams, one covering food and textiles, the other resistant materials and graphics. This results in inefficient management. Systems for marking pupils' work are not consistent and there is no cross-moderation of standards. Also some provisions are repeated. Standards, however, remain well above average and there has been good improvement to staffing and accommodation in recent years.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Years 10 and 11 as a result of good teaching
- Pupils achieve well across all years as a result of good teaching
- Extra-curricular provision is excellent
- Very good behaviour and personal relationships have a positive effect on learning
- ICT provision is unsatisfactory

Commentary

136. Teacher assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 were broadly in line with those found nationally. GCSE results were above the national average in 2003. Results have seen an upward trend since the previous inspection.
137. The standard of work seen of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is above that found nationally. Standards have improved as a result of appropriate focus on creative ideas and greater knowledge of colour and composition. The broad and varied curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to learn from different cultures. This enables them to develop their skills of pattern and textile design and gives them confidence to experiment with colour. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well compared to prior attainment. From a low starting point in Year 7 they make substantial gains by the end of Year 9. Improvements are the result of a variety of experiences and skills that explore texture, natural forms and three-dimensional design. Pupils' skills of sketching and drawing are less well developed. They are also less confident in using tone and line to develop their work and they are given too few opportunities to practise their basic and ICT skills.
138. Pupils continue to make good progress throughout Years 10 and 11. This is because they have a very good understanding of art and prominent artists. Pupils have many opportunities for wider reading and research and the high quality of resources supports learning very well. The main reason for examination success is the strong focus on individual support given by their teachers. Extra-curricular provision is excellent; a first-rate range of cultural visits and after-school clubs captures pupils' interest and supports course and class work. Sketchbooks are used well to show the development and planning of GCSE coursework. Although pupils'

work shows variety, their skills of sketching and drawing the human form remain less well developed.

139. Teaching and learning are good. Very good relationships, forged on mutual trust and respect, create an atmosphere of full co-operation. Teachers' knowledge of their specialist subject areas is good. They explain ideas clearly and simply, and as a result, pupils learn quickly and well, so they enjoy art lessons. Although pupils' attitudes are good overall, higher attaining pupils can become restless when insufficiently challenged or when there are few opportunities for independent learning. Assessment to track individual pupils across Years 7 to 9 is under-developed and there are too few opportunities for pupils to extend their ICT and basic skills. GCSE pupils are well motivated and mature in their approach to coursework. Lessons are thoughtfully planned and include many opportunities for wider reading and independent research.
140. The head of department gives good leadership, with a clear vision of how to raise standards through teaching and learning. The department is managed well. Teachers work well together and share good practice. New members of staff, including newly qualified teachers, are supported well and encouraged to develop new ideas and skills.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour result in concentrated working and good progress
- Work is well matched to the needs of differing groups of pupils
- Lessons are well planned and organised
- Resources are used very well to stimulate interest and to support learning
- Marking lacks information for pupils about their progress in relation to national standards
- The pace of lessons is sometimes slowed down by overlong explanations

Commentary

141. The number of pupils entered for GCSE in recent years is too small for valid comparisons with national statistics. Current standards in Years 10 and 11, where again numbers are low, are average. Some performances lack confidence and ensemble work in lessons is basic. There is good use of ICT in composition work, but compositions are often lacking in structured melodic development and variety of texture. In Years 7 to 9 standards are above average. Pupils show a good understanding of the elements of music and basic notation. They control keyboards confidently and play simple melodies, with most using fingering systems. Singing standards are above average. Their compositions show imagination with a good use of texture. In Years 7 to 9 pupils achieve well with all groups of pupils making good progress. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory in relation to the prior attainment of the small number taking music and the lack of instrumental experience within the group. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls; pupils of differing ethnicity achieve equally well.
142. Teaching and learning are good; consistency is the main characteristic. Very good behaviour and relationships mean that teachers can trust the pupils to work well on their own. Lessons are well planned and organised with very good use of resources to reinforce learning. The good teaching makes sure all groups fully integrated into the activities. Work is well matched to the differing needs of the pupils; for example, talented pupils are stretched well by extra work. Marking does not tell pupils clearly enough how well they are doing. Musical notation is thoroughly taught but sometimes over-lengthy explanations slow the pace of the lesson.

143. Leadership and management are good. The head of department provides a good role model and has created an effective team. The instrumental teaching is well co-ordinated. Performance data is monitored and analysed and taken account of when planning. The department makes a strong contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils both through work in lessons and through the very good range of extra-curricular activities. The take-up for instrumental teaching is average and the take-up for GCSE is below average. The quality of the department's accommodation and resources is very good. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 has improved. The use of ICT has improved; however, the number of pupils achieving higher grades at GCSE has decreased.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and improving
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good
- The quality of leadership is very good
- Improvement since the previous inspection is very good
- Assessment requires development

Commentary

144. Standards of work seen are above average by Year 9. This represents good achievement since many pupils until very recently began Year 7 with limited experience and understanding. Pupils have good knowledge of methods of warming up for different forms of exercise and know which muscle groups are being exercised. They have good understanding of techniques needed to improve performance. They can plan effective sequences of movement in dance and gymnastics and make appropriate choices in games. They have good skills of identifying strengths and weaknesses in their performances as individuals or as members of groups. Because these skills were developed from the start, pupils contribute to their learning without over-dependence upon teachers.
145. Results at GCSE were below average in 2003 with a significant number not obtaining expected grades. Provisional results for 2004 are well above the national average for 2003. Inspection evidence shows that standards continue to improve in Years 10 and 11. Good standards of performance are illustrated by the successes of teams and individuals in a wide variety of games and sporting activities. Unusually high proportions of pupils of all ages improve their skills through participation in the many opportunities available outside lesson times. In lessons, skills introduced earlier are developed further. Achievement continues to be good. High levels of effort are matched by enjoyment and growing understanding of the relevance of fitness to health. Pupils following GCSE and BTec courses have good and often very good practical skills. Writing is usually well organised and clearly expressed, demonstrating good knowledge and understanding. Most provide appropriate examples and sufficient detail to illustrate their answers.
146. Teaching and learning are very good; they raise achievement from below average when pupils start as 11 year olds to good by Years 9 and 11. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are structured very well with clear links to previous and future work so that pupils recognise their relevance. They explain tasks clearly, ensuring that pupils of all abilities, including the talented and those with special educational needs, are fully challenged, supported and valued. They have high expectations of effort and achievement and conduct

lessons at a consistently brisk pace. Good learning is evident in the development of skills, knowledge and understanding. Marking of written work praises but lacks advice on how to improve.

147. Pupils enjoy their work, have positive attitudes and want to improve. Achievement in hockey is restricted by lack of a suitable and safe grassed area or all-weather pitch. Changing rooms are cramped.
148. Leadership is very good. Reasons for disappointing results in 2003 were identified and appropriate action taken. There is highly effective sharing of responsibilities. Very able teachers share their experiences with each other and also work with local primary schools to assist their raising of standards. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection; standards have risen and the desire to do better goes on.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

GCSE classes in Years 10 and 11 were sampled. Standards are above average. Pupils achieve well. Teaching and learning were very good in the lessons sampled. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject, and give effective in-depth explanations. They make good use of ICT, for example interactive whiteboards to teach new ideas, such as the importance of production processes and break-even points in business planning.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

Provision for personal, social and health education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good variety of resources to bring the issues to life
- Very good attitudes help to raise standards
- The training programme for specialist teachers pays dividends, but that for form tutors is weaker

Commentary

149. All year groups have a good allocation of time and follow a well-structured programme of lessons. Visiting speakers and outside agencies are involved and there is a consistent approach, which is underpinned by the provision of materials and lesson notes for all parts of the course. A very strong contribution is made to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through studying topics such as the family, racism and drug abuse. Specially trained staff teach sensitive areas, such as sex education.
150. Teaching and learning are good. There is specialist training for year tutors and specialist staff but training for the form tutors who teach the younger pupils is less systematic. The best lessons are generally, but not always, taught by the more specialist staff; they feature interesting presentation and charismatic teaching. The less successful lessons use dull materials that fail to interest the pupils.
151. Standards of attainment are generally average with a good proportion above average, which reflects the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils show good relationships, collaborating well in groups and pairs. Very good attitudes and behaviour in lessons make for productive

working; achievement is good. For example, Year 7 pupils were able to understand such concepts as positivity and apply them to everyday life.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leads to good learning and good progress in lessons by pupils
- The school council provides good opportunities for active citizenship
- Pupils throughout the school show the attributes of responsibility and good citizenship
- Some opportunities for participation in active citizenship are not fully exploited
- Assessment of pupils in citizenship needs further development

Commentary

152. Citizenship is taught in Years 9, 10 and 11 primarily through the personal, social and health education course, which all pupils follow. This is supplemented in Years 7 and 8 by citizenship units in subject schemes of work.
153. Teaching and learning throughout the main school are good. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are shared with the pupils. Much imaginative teaching is used to make the potentially difficult content of the subject, such as the process of making laws in Parliament, easily understood by the pupils. Teachers have a good command of the subject and they present it in a lively manner so as to inspire interest. Teachers have high expectations; pupils try hard and their behaviour in lessons is very good. Teachers are positive and encouraging; pupils respond well. Sometimes, however, the match of the tasks set to the time available or the ability of pupils is not appropriate.
154. Pupils make good progress in lessons. Standards by Year 9 are above average and achievement is good. Pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills of discussion and research are above average. Standards by Year 11 are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are average but their skills of discussion are better developed. Pupils express and justify their opinions on topical issues and listen with respect to the opinions of others.
155. The school council system provides good opportunities for all pupils to gain experience of the representative process and to take part in decision making. It also enables pupils to take responsibility and to take up leadership roles. However, school and youth council elections are not run in such a way as to maximise pupils' learning about the electoral process.
156. Leadership of the subject is good and management is satisfactory. The school is strongly committed to the importance of the subject in the curriculum. Leadership has a clear vision for taking the subject forward. Planning to date has been good but there is further development needed. Subject contributions to citizenship in Years 7 and 8 need to identify their distinct citizenship objectives more clearly. Monitoring and evaluation are not systematic enough.
157. The promotion of good citizenship is central to the school's ethos and values. In their responsible attitudes, pupils exhibit the characteristics of good citizens throughout school life. They are active citizens in the school's very good range of charitable and other activities. Some of these experiences, such as the Refugee Day, are for whole cohorts of pupils and are clearly linked to learning in citizenship lessons. However, many of the other activities are not part of formal citizenship planning; they do not ensure equivalent opportunities for every pupil and are not linked explicitly to what pupils have learned at each stage of their citizenship

course. The full potential for pupils to apply what they have learned in citizenship is, therefore, not realised.

158. Assessment of pupils' skills is secure and reporting requirements to parents are met. However, assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding is not fully developed.
159. Citizenship was not a requirement at the time of the previous inspection.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	8	87.5	80.1	0.0	23.7	22.5	29.9
Biology	17	76.5	65.2	11.8	11.1	22.4	20.6
Business studies	3	66.7	76.4	0.0	16.3	20.0	26.2
Chemistry	8	62.5	72.7	12.5	13.9	22.5	24.1
Dance	1	100	86.9	0.0	35.0	20.0	34.5
English/English language	5	80.0	82.9	0.0	17.5	20.0	28.7
English literature	1	100.0	85.9	0.0	19.1	20.0	30.2
French	5	100.0	78.2	40.0	18.9	40.0	27.6
Design and technology	8	100.0	74.9	25.0	15.1	31.3	25.3
General studies	110	68.2	73.9	16.4	17.8	24.0	25.7
Geography	4	100.0	74.3	50.0	19.8	35.0	26.5
History	14	92.9	80.7	21.4	19.5	33.6	28.6
Information technology	18	38.9	67.0	5.6	10.9	11.1	21.4
Mathematics	17	41.2	61.9	5.9	17.1	11.8	22.1
Music	1	100.0	86.5	100.0	21.4	50.0	30.7
Other social studies	1	100.0	69.7	0.0	16.7	20.0	24.1
Physics	7	85.7	68.6	14.3	14.4	32.9	22.7
Religious studies	10	100.0	80.2	40.0	22.6	36.0	29.8
Spanish	9	77.8	78.5	22.2	17.7	26.7	27.3
Sports/PE studies	6	100.0	73.2	0.0	11.4	25.0	23.1

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	11	85	98.6	45.5	50.2	80.0	87.5
Biology	22	100	96.4	36.4	39.2	81.8	78.6
Business studies	18	100	98.7	55.6	36.8	91.1	80.1
Chemistry	13	100	97.6	61.5	49	96.6	84.9
English/English language	43	100	98.7	60.5	36.3	92.6	80.9
English literature	7	100	99.4	42.9	46.5	94.3	86.5
French	8	100	98.8	62.5	51.5	92.5	87.6
Design and technology	19	100	97.8	10.5	35.0	69.5	77.9
General studies	25	100	94.7	40.0	31.0	81.6	73.1
Geography	9	100	98.7	22.2	44.5	77.8	84.0
History	27	96.3	99.0	40.7	44.6	80.0	84.6
Information technology	13	43.1	69.5	0.0	24.6	43.1	69.5
Mathematics	21	100.0	96.7	33.3	55.6	83.8	88.8
Music	1	100	98.8	100	38.9	100	81.1
Other languages	1	100	96.9	100	64.5	120.0	93.8
Physics	12	100.0	96.7	16.7	44.6	75.0	81.7
Religious studies	18	100.0	98.8	44.4	46.7	82.2	85.6
Spanish	15	100.0	98.3	46.7	50.2	78.7	86.9
Sports /PE studies	9	100	98.0	33.3	30.9	77.8	75.2
Business VCE	18	100.0	65.	61.1	14.6	101.1	60.1
Health and social care VCE	26	88.5	67.7	38.5	14.5	70.8	63.5
Art and design VQ	8	100.0	69.3	37.5	23.8	75.0	70.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

The focus was on **English language and literature**. A lesson in **English literature** was sampled. Teaching was very good and students made very good progress. Work seen was at average levels. GCE A-level examination results for 2003 were well above the national average. Those for 2004 appear to be lower.

A lesson in **English language** was also sampled. Teaching was good and students made good progress. Work seen was at above average levels. GCE A-level examination results for 2004 appear to be above the 2003 average.

English language and literature

Overall provision in English language and literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and their own very positive attitudes help students to achieve well beyond expectations
- A-level results are well above the national average
- Very good management helps all students to organise and plan their work well

Commentary

160. Results in GCE A-level examinations for 2003 were well above average and those for 2004 appear to be a little higher. Work seen during the inspection is also well above average. Students achieve very well. 2003 A-level results show that almost all students gained higher grades than those suggested by the standard of their work when they entered the sixth form.
161. By Year 13 students are very confident in their knowledge of linguistics. Their writing about literary texts is detailed and perceptive. Creative writing is refreshing and well crafted. Students research and plan essays carefully so that the lines of argument are persuasive and well supported by textual evidence. Notes are meticulously organised to provide powerful support for examination revision. Students are always very positive in class and work hard outside lessons. They enjoy the diversity of the course and feel very well supported throughout.
162. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are enthusiastic and conduct lessons at a brisk pace. They plan carefully to ensure that tasks are varied and that students are as active as possible. In a very good lesson Year 12 students explored figurative language in small groups before writing their own attempts at radio plays. They were so engrossed in this practical work that they learnt very well. A Year 13 group also learnt rapidly because they were all very active in analysing Shakespeare's language in *Othello*. Teachers are very skilful at making complex ideas clear to students through striking examples and simple strategies. Students respect teachers for their very good knowledge and unremitting support. Very few students fail to complete either Year 12 or 13. Assessment is very thorough and closely tracks students' progress. Excellent marking tells students exactly where they are in relation to examination standards. It shows them precisely what they must do to improve further.
163. Very good management gives all students a clear overview of examination requirements. Students are well informed about courses in advance of joining the sixth form and so they make rapid progress in Year 12. Students enjoy the additional variety that arises from having two teachers.

164. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. A-level examination results were above average at the time of the previous inspection. They are now well above.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

165. Standards of literacy in the sixth form are above average. Students' skills in language are sufficient to meet demands in all subjects. Students speak confidently and work well together in groups. Increasing use of the library extends the range of many students' reading. In most subjects teachers offer students useful support for developing literacy, though there is scope for improvement with lower attainers in business studies. Well-planned support from teachers in English, German and further mathematics lessons helps students to improve their written work.

Modern foreign languages

The focus was on **German**. **Spanish** and **French** were also sampled. In 2003, AS and A-level results in French and Spanish were above average overall, with well above average results in AS French. One very good Year 12 French lesson, a good Year 13 French lesson, and a good Year 12 Spanish lesson were seen. In all lessons, the teachers' consistent use of the foreign language and the students' very good understanding of examination requirements resulted in their good progress, especially in reading and writing. Current standards are above average and achievement is good. The pleasing increase in boys studying languages in the sixth form is a direct result of the department's policy on increasing boys' motivation in Years 7 to 11. The lack of modern foreign languages assistants and exchange visits restricts students' access to authentic foreign language and culture.

German

Provision in German is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students gained above average results at AS level in 2003 and most went on to achieve well at A-level in 2004
- Students in Year 12 work hard in response to good teaching and have made a good start to the course
- Lack of authentic resources, including opportunities to communicate regularly with native speakers, limits the breadth of students' learning experiences

Commentary

166. Grades for eight students taking AS level in 2003 were above average. Two of the five students going on to A-level obtained A and B grades; the remainder gained a C grade. This represents good achievement for both male and female students. Retention is excellent; all students completed the courses on which they embarked.
167. Because German is offered every two years, reflecting provision of a second modern language in Years 8 to 11, no work was seen in Year 13. However, samples of completed coursework from last year's A-level students indicate very high standards in writing by the end of the course. In the early stages of their course, the standards of students in Year 12 are average. They work hard, have positive attitudes and support each other well in classwork. They have not yet reached the level of confidence that will accelerate their learning, but both male and female students are achieving well so far, in the context of their GCSE grades. Male students contribute more readily in oral work. Listening skills are improving most rapidly, as

students hear a lot of German, from teachers, cassettes and each other. The range of ability is most apparent in written work, with female students particularly prone to errors in basic language, although all students show signs of progress in applying more complex language learned this term.

168. The quality of teaching and learning is good; standards reached in completed coursework confirm this view. Teachers make their expectations clear by using German exclusively to conduct lessons, and prompting students to do likewise. Consequently, confidence and competence in speaking and listening are improving. Planning for lessons and teaching methods are effective. Students work with different partners and learn from each other. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject transmits to students, who respond willingly to the various tasks set for them. The range of resources used is limited. Very good use is made of course books and their associated materials. However, ICT is not used to support language learning, and opportunities to vary and enliven students' learning experiences by using authentic audio and video resources are lost. Students do not benefit from the individual oral engagement provided by a foreign language assistant.
169. Leadership is good. Work is shared equitably between two specialists with very good subject knowledge. The effectiveness of this partnership is clear from results and from students' responses. Management is satisfactory. Long-term planning consists of a division of responsibilities. There is no documentation to identify activities and resources for delivering topics, which would support any new or stand-in teacher. Arrangements for assessment are satisfactory. Students visit Berlin briefly after completing their AS-level examinations. This is a very positive experience for them, but there are no current arrangements for more meaningful immersion in German culture, for example through exchange visits or work experience abroad. The overall profile of results, achievement and teaching is very similar to that reported at the previous inspection, so that improvement has been satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and management provide students with high quality learning opportunities
- Very good teaching enhances students' capacity to work on their own
- Very good use of ICT promotes very good learning.
- Excellent accommodation and resources enhance the range of learning activities.

Commentary

170. Results at A-level have improved in recent years. In 2003, all students who completed the course gained a pass grade. However, this represented underachievement by many students. In 2004 the results were much improved and were in line with national expectations. All students were successful in obtaining grades and over half of them obtained A or B grades, representing good achievement. All further mathematics students were successful and continue to study mathematics at university. Almost all students were successful in their AS examination with well over half obtaining higher, A or B, grades. There is a predominance of male students on courses.
171. In work seen, Year 13 standards of attainment are above those expected in a typical A-level group. There is an improvement in the number of able students continuing from AS to the A-level course. The improving mathematical competence of students recruited to Year 12 is seen in the high quality of work produced. However, there is some carelessness in use of elementary algebra, which slows progress for some. Students cover their programmes of

study well and by Year 13 they are confident in taking responsibility for their own learning. Work presented is mathematically rigorous, showing good understanding of mathematical method. Very mature attitudes, good humour and personal development enable open dialogue on ways to improve. Students from all social and ethnic backgrounds achieve well in lessons. Those students following the further mathematics course make very rapid progress during their lessons.

172. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and experience provide lessons that are insightful and very well structured. As a result, learning is very good. The use of interactive whiteboards, by teachers and students, enhances the quality of lessons. Teachers know their students well and provide very good challenge and pace in lessons. They care about their students' success and give freely of their time to provide support for them. Very mature learning relationships develop students' confidence as mathematicians.
173. Leadership and management are excellent. There is a clear vision of developments required for new courses. The head of department leads a very skilled team of teachers, which offers a wide variety of learning opportunities to students. There is a very effective assessment system by which students are monitored. There is a constant dialogue between teachers and students, which informs students how they are able to improve. Excellent accommodation and resources enable effective learning in a stimulating environment. Well-developed links with local universities provide many opportunities for enrichment of learning opportunities.
174. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good; standards have risen and the subject's popularity goes on increasing, as does its influence within and beyond the school.

Mathematics across the curriculum

175. Students' mathematical skills are above average and contribute well to their studies in other subjects. For example, they are confident users of mathematics, from architectural design in design and technology lessons, to using high level statistical analyses in geography. They are able to use complex formulae in spreadsheets in the GNVQ ICT course. Although mathematical skills are not developed through a key skills course, students are able to re-take GCSE mathematics to improve their understanding and grades.

SCIENCE

The focus was on **biology**. **Physics** and **chemistry** were also sampled.

In 2003, results in A-level chemistry were well above national averages, with two-thirds of students attaining a higher, A or B, grade. In 2004 results were similar. In a Year 13 chemistry lesson students learnt well about the differences between the reactions of two different groups of chemicals through a well-prepared practical activity and questions to probe their understanding.

In 2003, results in A-level physics were in line with national averages, with all students attaining a pass grade, a third of them at the higher, A or B, grades. One Year 12 physics lesson was sampled. Students from different countries and science backgrounds learnt well because the teacher used an effective model to simulate energy levels before asking questions at the correct level for each student.

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average
- Good teaching and students' positive attitudes produce good achievement

- Laboratory accommodation is inadequate

Commentary

176. Results at A-level and AS-level in 2002 and 2003 were above the national average. The standards of work seen during the inspection are also above average; students achieve well. In 2004, results were again good at AS-level but disappointing at A-level with one-quarter of the students failing, mainly as a result of unsatisfactory attendance and inadequate accommodation.
177. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are enthusiastic and conduct lessons briskly. They plan carefully to keep the students interested. In a very good Year 12 lesson, a simple card game 'Guess the Organelle' reinforced students' previously acquired knowledge and formed a good foundation for the new work on differential centrifugation. This complex process was expertly explained by the teacher who then allowed the students to individually consolidate their learning via an interactive website using the wireless laptop computers. The students were fully engaged throughout the lesson with very efficient learning taking place.
178. The module tests that monitor students' progress are effective. However, because these are short-answer questions, too few opportunities arise for students to write extended prose. As a result there is inadequate preparation for examinations that require longer written answers.
179. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of department has been in post for only six months and is still feeling her way in this new role. She leads a team of knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers who all share a strong commitment to continued improvement. Her ideas are already paying off with a good increase in the number of students opting for AS biology.
180. The laboratory accommodation is inadequate. At present half of the AS biology lessons take place in classrooms and a quarter of the A-level lessons. This is unsatisfactory and is likely to get worse with the increased number of students opting for biology.
181. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards have improved and more students are studying biology in the sixth form. The ICT resources and facilities have been significantly improved.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good relationships between teachers and students
- Teaching and learning are good, and students are achieving well
- Students are very interested in the subject and value it as a career pathway
- There is a limited range of courses for students

Commentary

182. In 2003 AS and A-level results were well below average. There was a marked improvement in 2004, but results were still the poorest in the school with no higher grade A/B passes and the second largest proportion of unclassifieds.
183. Students are achieving well given the limited experience they have had beforehand, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are average, although in some

Year 12 classes standards are slightly lower, as students have no GCSE course background. Students taking the GNVQ course are able to create macros in word documents. AS students can identify storage devices and capacities. They understand what local and wide area networks (LANs and WANs) mean. In Year 13 there are average standards in students' project work. All students are capable users of word processing software and produce presentable folders. Higher attaining students have good knowledge in the use of spreadsheets and databases, although numerous others lack expected levels of knowledge of these programs.

184. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject, which is well used in detailed explanations, and explanation of course requirements. There is very effective monitoring of work with established and routine discussion between students and teachers. As a result, students understand how well they are doing and how to improve the quality of their work. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, and this is a significant factor in the very good productivity in lessons.
185. Leadership and management of the subject are improving and good. Teaching is monitored well; this is leading to rising standards. The numbers of students taking advanced courses are increasing as many of them intend to use the subject as a route through higher education towards a career in ICT. Introduced recently, the GNVQ course provides a vocational course for some students, but there is scope to expand the range of courses available beyond this and A-level. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection; provision is broader and standards have risen.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

186. Students make good use of ICT skills in many subjects. There is particularly good use in mathematics. In all subjects students make extensive use of the Internet for research purposes, and where they are required to complete projects they make effective use of word-processing skills in the presentation of their work. Students are very good users of the technology, and make effective use of the email facility provided by the school to transfer work between home and school.

HUMANITIES

Geography was the focus of the inspection. **History** was also sampled. Teaching and learning were good; the teacher used skilled questioning to ensure that students made good progress in their knowledge and understanding. Students' attainment was in line with expectations for early in the course.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it effectively to help students achieve
- Students are encouraged to become responsible for their own research and learning
- Marking of written work is helpful in showing students how to improve
- Fieldwork greatly helps students with their learning

Commentary

187. In 2003, A-level results were below the national average. Much improved results in 2004 will probably be above the national average, continuing a rising trend. Students' results are a little higher, on average, than in their other subjects.
188. The subject recruits and retains its students well, but very nearly every one is male. Early in the AS course, inspection evidence suggests below average standards. Lower attaining students in Year 12 make only steady progress in their knowledge, at below expected rates. However, students demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of physical processes, like tropical cyclones. They have started to come to an understanding of the life in rural areas and the quality of life in less developed countries. Higher attaining students discuss their understanding of the subject well with their teachers; they also write well.
189. Achievement is good. By Year 13, most students have built on their prior learning by developing a deeper understanding of what is involved in a study of the subject and this, together with their increasing ability to write well, means they are making good progress. Most students are developing as independent and increasingly effective learners.
190. Teaching is good. Teachers plan their lessons well and this, together with the activities they devise for them, helps in their understanding and increases their knowledge. Skilful questioning often leads into good discussions with many students taking part. Relationships in lessons are very good and expectations are high and most students rise to the level expected of them. Work is marked regularly and students benefit from the constructive comments they receive that help them improve.
191. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has a clear vision and knows the direction the subject needs to go. The scheme of work has been revised and now serves the students well. Assessment is good and is being used well to inform student progress. The use of fieldwork is clearly helping students in their understanding of parts of the curriculum. The study of geography would benefit from a more balanced gender group. The rising pattern of results indicates good improvement since the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and standards are above average
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good
- Leadership of the course is very good
- The range of courses offered is narrow and does not include vocational options

Commentary

192. The course studied is product design with graphics and materials. A-level results were below average in 2003. The provisional results for 2004 are above average with all students obtaining passes and an above average proportion obtaining the higher grade, A or B, passes. Results for AS examinations in 2003 were above the national average for students obtaining grades A and B and provisional results for 2004 are above the 2003 average.

193. Recruitment and retention for the duration of courses are good. In work seen, standards are above average in Years 12 and 13 with significantly more students choosing the subject. Almost all who begin the course complete it. Year 12 students have adapted well to the additional rigour of A-level work and express their ideas through sketches and formal drawing effectively. They show a mature approach to their studies during discussion about design. Year 13 students are responding to the higher level of challenge and have made a very good start with new projects. Their work is well ordered in folders, and that of higher attaining students shows very good understanding of interior design. The work of lower attaining students communicates ideas and is effectively presented, though research and writing lack depth.
194. From well above average standards when they start the sixth form course, students achieve well in Years 12 and 13. This is because students are very well taught and have very positive attitudes to learning. Teachers successfully guide students to manage their projects well so that they have time to spend on improving work as necessary. Students learn extra skills to meet the requirements of their projects, such as architectural drawings for interior design.
195. Teachers have very good knowledge of both the subject and examination requirements. They communicate their own enthusiasm for the subject to students and earn their respect. They plan work for individual students very effectively through target setting and mark work constructively, so students know what to do to improve. Because there are very good relationships and mutual respect between students and teachers, students gain both academically and personally.
196. New leadership has very effectively raised standards. Excellent co-operation between teachers benefits students through very thorough planning of lessons.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art was sampled in Years 12 and 13. Students achieve well, as a result of good teaching and effective guidance that is linked to coursework planning and examination requirements. The subject makes an excellent contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through its strong links with local galleries and artists. Students' skills of research are well developed and they are inspired to learn from prominent artists to produce a high standard of work.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

A Year 13 lesson was sampled in **sports studies**. A-level results were above average in 2003, with girls doing better than boys. The same results in 2004 were slightly better, but with fewer candidates. Above average levels of knowledge and understanding were evident in a very good lesson on sport in other cultures. Students were quick to recognise significant features in a very good selection of resources presented to them. They were confident in offering opinions and interpretations.

BUSINESS

Provision in business studies is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Combined very good quality of teaching, learning and assessment, culminating in well above average results, produce excellence
- The courses provide an excellent match to the needs of a very wide range of students

- Relationships between staff and students are very strong and students respond with excellent attitudes that result in a very high degree of motivation
- Very strong support to individuals aids understanding on how to achieve higher grades

Commentary

197. In 2003, A-level results were well above average and AVCE results were very high. In both cases girls' performance overall was better than boys'. More than half the students entered for AS in 2003 achieved higher, A or B, grades. In 2004, A-level results contained a lower proportion of higher grades; re-marks of scripts are awaited. There was an absence of higher grades in AVCE in 2004. The proportion of grades A or B achieved in AS was higher than in the previous year. Boys performed better than girls in A-level in 2004 with no differences in the other courses. In work seen standards are well above average for A-level and above average for AVCE. Retention rates on courses are very high.
198. Achievement is very good from a wide range of starting points. Students use key terminology very well in discussion and in written work. A-level students develop very strong numeracy skills. They are very confident in applying formulae to case studies, drawing conclusions from their calculations and arguing particular points of view. Literacy skills are not as strong, with only higher attainers providing in-depth responses to case study material. AVCE students develop excellent independent study skills including skills in using ICT for investigation and presentation. Evaluation skills are a weaker area, except for higher attainers. Retention rates on courses are very high. There is some excellent individual achievement as a result of a very high level of motivation.
199. Teaching and learning are very good overall including some excellent features. Methods match course requirements very well. A-level students learn to use and apply difficult ideas because teaching is very effective in ensuring that students are able to generalise, reason and draw conclusions. AVCE students develop excellent independent study skills because of methods that give students a very clear structure to work on their own. Assessment is very effective in giving students a very clear understanding of how to improve. Teaching is very effective in engaging students. There is a very strong rapport between students and staff. Students respond with excellent attitudes, producing a very high degree of motivation.
200. Leadership and management are very good. The department has developed a very strong empathy with students and they respond with excellent attitudes. They make excellent progress in developing their personal qualities such as confidence and working together. There is a very strong sense of direction in planning although target setting lacks precision. The courses provided meet the needs of students very well, including high attainers. There is both academic rigour and a 'real life' dimension through links with local business. Improvement from the previous inspection is very good.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and social care

Provision in health and social care is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and consequently students' learning are very good
- Most students have a very positive attitude to their work
- Overall achievement is good
- Assessment procedures are well understood and used well to promote improvement

Commentary

201. Prior attainment is below average among students on this course. In 2003, results in the AVCE course were above average, with many students achieving well above their predicted levels. The results for 2004 represent an improvement on this performance; there has been steady improvement over the past three years. This all shows very good achievement for almost all students and clear added value over the two years of the course.
202. In the current Year 13, most students are making very good progress, again from what was a below average starting point. For example, the assessment of already completed assignments indicates that standards are above average and progress is clearly good. Students are able to use specialist vocabulary with confidence, and competence in work that shows a good level of knowledge and understanding of the organisation of the Health Service. There is good evidence in both Years 12 and 13 of competence in making full use of ICT skills. Students can word process their written work, retrieve, analyse and present data and carry out research tasks that extend and support their subject knowledge. The standard of work completed by many Year 12 students is above 'E' grade after only four weeks on the course.
203. These standards are achieved as a result of two key factors: very good teaching and learning and the very positive attitude of most students. All teachers have very good subject knowledge, particularly in their own areas of expertise, for example in child development or anatomy and physiology. The planning and preparation of lessons are strong features of their work and this ensures that the varying needs of all students are met. Teachers build good relationships. Sensitive individual attention successfully encourages improvement, often by setting short-term targets to raise standards, especially in assignments. The students speak highly of the nature and level of support they receive both within and beyond lesson time. Most are hard working and concentrate for long periods particularly well whether as individuals or members of groups. The assessment element of teaching is well understood and well used to raise standards and promote achievement; work is regularly, thoroughly and accurately assessed and progress reviewed. The clearly staged grade criteria, together with supportive teacher comments, ensure that all students know what needs to be done in order to improve and thus make progress towards reaching a higher level.
204. The head of department provides very good leadership and the subject is very well organised. There is good vision and a most positive approach to the future. The school is aware of the gaps in the vocational strand created by the discontinuation of the former foundation and intermediate GNVQ levels in the subject in the 14-19 curriculum, which narrow opportunities.
205. Since the previous inspection there has been a good improvement in standards and, especially, in the quality of teaching. There is clearly a strong basis on which to build.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Three lessons of **general studies** were sampled. Teaching and learning were good, although some Year 12 students found their lesson content over-taxing. Moral issues were a consistent theme that helped personal development very well. Standards are above average. The school provides a good diet of activities designed to help students' personal development. A personal, social and moral education programme is at the heart of provision; it helps students to improve their personal skills and reinforces other aspects of curricular and extra-curricular provision well. Teaching and learning are good. Key skill development is good; students are articulate and able to calculate well. They collaborate well and have positive relationships with others, including the staff. Numerous opportunities to improve key skills arise in general studies and most other lessons, as well as in student council activities and courses specifically designed for the purpose, such as ICT-related extra lessons and chances to re-take English and mathematics examinations.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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