

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARTIN'S SCHOOL

Brentwood

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115349

Headteacher: Dr N Darby

Lead inspector: Mr M Beale

Dates of inspection: 8-12 November 2004

Inspection number: 269562

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

© Crown copyright 2004

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Foundation
Age range of pupils: 11-18
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1731

School address: Hanging Hill Lane
Hutton
Brentwood
Essex
Postcode: CM13 2HG

Telephone number: 01277 238300
Fax number: 01277 238301

Appropriate authority: Governing body
Name of chair of governors: Mr E Smith

Date of previous inspection: 18 – 22 January 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The number of pupils has increased since the last inspection in this large school, which also has a large and expanding sixth form. There are 20 per cent more boys than girls, although this difference is much lower in the sixth form. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is below average and falling. There are few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds with no group represented in significant numbers, although 20 per cent of parents have preferred not to indicate the ethnic grouping which best represents their child's background. A small proportion of pupils are learning English as an additional language but no pupil is at an early stage. Attainment on entry to the main school is well above average. It is also well above average and rising on entry to the sixth form where the school requires at least 53 GCSE points from 10 subjects before students are allowed to stay on. The vast majority of students follow AS and A Level courses with a small number studying for advanced vocational qualifications. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs is below average as is the number with statements. No students are identified with special educational needs in the sixth form. The school is a technology college and a Beacon school. It received a School Achievement Award in 2001 and achieved Investors in People status in 2004.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19385	Martin Beale	Lead inspector	
14214	Jill Smith	Lay inspector	
4351	Jeanne Strickland	Team inspector	English English as an additional language
32379	Bob Brewster	Team inspector	Mathematics
15079	Tony Boys	Team inspector	Special education needs Biology (sixth form) Chemistry (sixth form)
8052	Ken McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Business studies
20716	Reg Grogan	Team inspector	Religious education History (sixth form)
1489	Paul King	Team inspector	Art and design
31345	Kay Arthur	Team inspector	Design and technology
33015	Richard Winter	Team inspector	Geography
10759	Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	History
32173	Barbara Brown	Team inspector	French German
27665	Alrene Lees	Team inspector	Citizenship
18888	Jan Boulton	Team inspector	Physical education
4126	Clive Parsons	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (sixth form)
28002	Sue Taylor	Team inspector	Psychology
30563	Jackie Pentlow	Team inspector	
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	
34277	Frances Soul	Team inspector	Science

The inspection contractor was:

PBM, Brookbridge and Bedford Ltd
13A Market Place
Uttoxeter
Staffordshire
ST14 8HY

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet *'Complaining about Ofsted Inspections'*, which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	14
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	21
WORK RELATED LEARNING	23
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	25
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	41
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	58

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This good school is providing good value for money. It is expanding, oversubscribed and a popular choice for parents and their children. Standards are rising, particularly in Years 7 to 11. There is a strong sense of purpose around the school where pupils learn and develop in a harmonious environment. The methods adopted by most teachers and the pupils' positive attitudes result in good achievement and well above average GCSE results. The school's expansion has been managed well; the headteacher and senior team are fully focused on raising standards further.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- pupils make good progress across Years 7 to 11 and GCSE results are well above average; however, they are not sufficiently high in the sciences or in design and technology;
- the school has not taken sufficiently robust action to raise the proportion of highest grades at GCSE and A Level or to improve boys' achievement in Years 10 and 11;
- the high quality of history, physical education, religious education and modern foreign languages teaching in Years 10 and 11 is enabling the pupils to achieve very well;
- the senior team has rightly identified broadening teaching and learning styles as a priority to raise achievement further particularly for high attaining pupils;
- the rigorous attention paid to reducing absence has led to very good attendance and punctuality throughout the school;
- the valuable new courses introduced in Years 10 and 11 have not been planned sufficiently in partnership with the institutions to which the pupils transfer after Year 11.

Test and examination results have improved faster than nationally since the last inspection, and improvement is good. There has been mixed success in dealing with the minor shortcomings identified at the time. For example, results at both GCSE and A Level have improved, although the need to raise the number of the highest grades has not been tackled successfully in all subjects. Statutory requirements are now met for religious education. However, compliance with requirements for a daily act of worship has only been met since September 2004 and the implementation of new class-based procedures has not been evaluated. Withdrawal arrangements for pupils with special educational needs are now carefully planned.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement is good overall, and is satisfactory in the sixth form. Overall standards are well above average across Years 7 to 11 and above average in the sixth form. Year 9

national test results are consistently well above average and rising. The upward trend in GCSE results has been more rapid than improvements nationally in recent years, although there was a slight fall in 2004. Targets have been exceeded but are not sufficiently challenging for the highest grades at GCSE. Results in the sciences and design and technology are not as good as they should be at GCSE, given the pupils' well above average attainment on entry, and pupils are not achieving as well as they should in these subjects. Standards in English and mathematics are well above average by Year 9 and Year 11; they are above average in science. A Level results improved immediately after the last inspection but have been at a similar level for the last three years. Overall results are well above average partly because all students take general studies as an extra A Level. The performance in individual subjects is in line with national averages overall, but as at GCSE there are insufficient higher grades.

The pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have positive attitudes to their work and are keen to do well. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is good. Teaching is good overall, and is satisfactory in the sixth form. Several teachers use a wide variety of interesting methods to promote the pupils' learning. Many lessons are taught well, although often teachers adopt a narrow range of styles, which do not ensure that important aspects of learning are developed sufficiently. Assessment is thorough but is not used consistently to plan lessons and set targets that challenge. The curriculum is satisfactory and is enhanced by a good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport. Recently introduced courses for lower-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 support their needs, aspirations and aptitudes well but are not planned sufficiently closely with likely providers of their future education and training. The care and welfare of the pupils are promoted successfully and developing links with parents and the community enhance their learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The effective leadership of the headteacher has been instrumental in raising the profile and expectations of the school. He is supported well in this by an effective team of senior leaders who are becoming more focused on the impact of pupils' learning on their subsequent achievement. Procedures to monitor the work of teachers and to hold departments to account for their provision and standards are becoming increasingly rigorous. Governors have recently reorganised their procedures and are reaching a point where they challenge the school more effectively. Statutory responsibilities are largely met. Race equality policy was introduced later than required and the school's data on ethnicity is not sufficiently accurate to enable effective monitoring to take place. The induction of new staff is particularly effective. Improvement planning is detailed but does not focus sufficiently on giving a sharp strategic view of the school and does not link closely with financial planning.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very much in support of the work of the school. They are pleased with the new arrangements for communicating with staff through the link manager, but some have concerns about proposed changes to parental consultation. Pupils are proud of their school and pleased to be here. Parents have some concerns about the behaviour of a small minority of pupils. However, pupils said there was no particular problem with discipline. Inspectors agree; most pupils can be relied upon to behave well during lessons and around the school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- increase the proportion of higher grades at GCSE and A Level;
- raise boys' achievement in Years 10 and 11 and achievement in the sciences and design and technology throughout the school;
- implement vigorously the plans to broaden teaching and learning styles throughout the school;
- develop a closer working partnership with other institutions from Year 10 upwards for the education of pupils for whom courses are not available in the sixth form.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- for monitoring the policy for race equality.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ST MARTIN'S SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

Sixth form provision is satisfactory. The number of students has increased significantly in recent years. A wide choice of courses is available which meet the needs of those students who achieve the high entry requirement. Students' total points scored are well above the national average, although results in individual subjects are more usually average. This is satisfactory progress from the students' previous results at GCSE and their achievement is satisfactory. The head of the sixth form has accurately identified strengths and weaknesses and is implementing a programme of improvement, but heads of subject have not consistently done this to focus on raising students' achievement. The sixth form provides satisfactory cost-effectiveness.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- overall results are well above the national average, although results in individual subjects are mostly in line with the average;
- there are numerous examples of good and very good teaching and learning, but the overall quality is satisfactory;
- the head of the sixth form provides good leadership and management, but some subject leaders do not focus sufficiently on raising standards;
- the facilities made available to students are very good, including an effective library area and computer facilities.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<p>Provision in English is satisfactory. Results at A Level have fallen and are not as high as they should be. Results were below average in 2004. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but based on a limited range of styles.</p> <p>Provision in French is very good. Standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Teachers constantly and consistently challenge the students in a wide range of contexts.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Provision in mathematics is satisfactory. A Level results are well below average and students could achieve more. Teaching is based on too narrow a range of methods, although the students have good attitudes to their work.</p>
Science	<p>Provision in biology is satisfactory. Students achieve the standards expected given their entry levels, although A Level results in 2004 were well below average. Teaching is satisfactory but with some very good features.</p> <p>Provision in chemistry is satisfactory. Students achieve at an appropriate level, because teaching is satisfactory overall with some good features. Standards have improved but A Level results are still below average.</p>
Information and communication technology	<p>Provision in information and communication technology is satisfactory. Standards are above average and students achieve at an appropriate level given their prior attainment. There is innovative use of new technology.</p>

Humanities	<p>Provision in geography is satisfactory. Standards are above average, but not as high as they could be given the students' GCSE results. Teaching and learning are satisfactory,</p> <p>Provision in history is good. A Level results were average in 2004, with relatively few high grades. Achievement is now good and lessons engage the students in their learning through a variety of approaches.</p> <p>Provision in psychology is satisfactory. Recent A Level results have been well below average, although current standards are much better. Teaching is satisfactory overall and the students have good attitudes.</p>
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<p>Provision in design and technology is satisfactory. Standards are average and the students' attitudes are good. Teaching is satisfactory but within a narrow range of methods.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Provision in art and design is satisfactory. Standards are above average, but more students are capable of attaining higher grades at A Level to reflect their standards on entry to the course.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<p>Provision in physical education is excellent. Standards are high because teaching and learning are very good. Students have exceptional attitudes and respond very positively to their teachers' demanding expectations.</p>
Business	<p>Provision in business studies is good. Vocational results in 2004 were above average, but A Level results fell from above average in 2003 to below average. Courses are well planned and achievement benefits from good teaching.</p>

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

The advice, guidance and support for students are good. Students have had access to a good range of external speakers in helping them decide on future careers and the subjects to study. The induction programme is good, and the extended trial period for courses results in relatively high retention rates. Access to personal careers advice continues to be available in the sixth form and the recently introduced tutorial programme is encouraging closer professional relationships between tutors and students. Systems for supporting higher education applications are effective.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The overall quality of leadership and management within sixth form provision is satisfactory, with that of the head of the sixth form being good. The strengths and weaknesses present have been accurately identified and an improvement programme is being implemented with some success. However, too few subject leaders have identified what constitutes an appropriate challenge for individual or groups of students and the teaching and learning strategies that are required to achieve these.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Sixth form students are happy with the provision, but have some dissatisfaction with the advice and guidance that they are given and with how well the school seeks and responds to their views. Inspectors disagree with these concerns. The inspection judges that the

quality of guidance provided to the current Year 12 prior to entry was good, as is that for the current Year 13 in preparing for higher education. The sixth form council provides a good mechanism for students to express their views and members describe a positive working relationship with sixth form managers. Students recognise and appreciate the very good facilities and resources to which they have access.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is good in Years 7 to 11 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Standards are well above average overall by Year 11 although girls are doing better than boys by that stage. Standards are above average in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test and examination results are well above average, although there is scope for more pupils to gain the top grades at GCSE and A Level.
- Pupils achieve well in many subjects but do not achieve all that they should in the sciences and in design and technology.
- Pupils with special educational needs are catered for well and make good progress towards meeting their targets.
- Achievement benefits from the good levels of basic skills that the pupils bring when they arrive at the school.

Commentary

1. National Curriculum test results for Year 9 pupils rose more rapidly than nationally since the last inspection. Results in 2004 were well above average in mathematics and science and represented good progress for the pupils from their Year 6 tests. No national comparisons are available for 2004 English tests. However, the school's 2003 results were well above average and they rose in 2004. Girls have attained better results than boys in English over the last few years, while boys have done better than girls in mathematics and science.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	38.1 (36.4)	n/a (33.4)
mathematics	40.4 (39.1)	35.5 (35.4)
science	36.6 (36.9)	33.1 (33.6)

There were 280 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. GCSE results had also risen more rapidly than nationally from the last inspection to 2003, although there was a slight fall in 2004. In spite of this fall the school exceeded its targets. Results in 2004 were well above the national average and compared favourably with results in similar schools. Differences in performance by gender at GCSE are more marked than at Year 9. Boys have not performed as well as girls at GCSE and this gap has been greater than nationally. Indeed, while the overall progress of the pupils who sat GCSE in 2004 from their attainment on entry to the school was satisfactory, it was boys of all abilities who tended not to meet their targets and hence made slower progress than girls. Results in English and mathematics were well above average in 2004. The number of pupils gaining the

equivalent of a science A*-C grade was also well above the national average even though this does not reflect performance in the individual science subjects.

- Results in virtually all subjects were above or substantially above average in 2004. The exceptions to this were average results in design and technology, art and design, information and communication technology and physics and below average results in business studies, chemistry and both single and double science. The number of A* and A grades at GCSE was better than the national figure, but there is scope for there to be more given the attainment of pupils when they enter the school. This is particularly the case in both the science and design and technology faculties, which were also the subjects where overall targets were missed in 2004 and pupil progress slowest.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	76 (81)	51 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95 (97)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	97 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	332.1	282.5

There were 277 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- The overall achievement of the pupils in Years 7 to 11 is the result of a combination of factors. A considerable proportion of the teaching is good or better. This coupled with the pupils' positive approach to their studies, their hard work, very good attendance and punctuality and parental support all enable most pupils to make good progress. They also have good basic skills that are used to support their achievement. There is little overall difference in achievement between Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11. Standards are well above average in English, mathematics and history by Year 9, and above average at this stage in all other subjects except for design and technology, music and citizenship where standards are average. Achievement is particularly good in history throughout the school and in French, German and physical education in Years 10 and 11. It is these subjects, English, mathematics and religious education where standards are well above average by Year 11. Standards are above average by Year 11 in all other subjects except for design and for technology and information and communication technology where standards are average. It remains the case that not all subjects are enabling all pupils capable of the highest standards by Year 11 to achieve these levels. This is reflected in the below average number of A* and A grades these subjects get at GCSE.
- Pupils identified as having special educational needs make good progress in meeting the targets set in their individual education plans. They achieve well in most subjects and their examination results match or exceed expectations. The achievement of the small number of pupils learning English as an additional language is good in Years 7 to 11. Achievement of gifted and talented pupils is similar to others when they are challenged in top sets. However, there is no systematically planned programme to extend their achievement consistently.

6. The pupils' basic skills are of a consistently high level to be able to support their achievement in a wide range of subjects. They have above average literacy skills and their competence in mathematics is well above average. They also have good skills in information and communication technology. While they apply these skills to good effect, there is limited effort within subjects to develop these skills further.

Sixth form

7. Overall, A Level results have risen since the last inspection. The average total results of students were well above average in 2003 and at a similar level in 2004. This very favourable comparison with national figures is partly because all students sit general studies at both AS and A level. Nationally, general studies accounts for about 10 per cent of A Level entries; it accounts for 25 per cent of all entries at St Martin's School. This has the effect of raising the students' overall results quite considerably compared to other schools. By other measures, the A Level results are less strong. For example, the number of A and B grades was average in 2003 but fell in 2004 to be below average. Similarly, the average result for each A Level sat was only broadly average. When considered by these measures, the overall progress made by students from their attainment on entry to the sixth form was only just at a level seen nationally. However, several students achieve the top grades in all of their subjects and high proportions go on to higher education.
8. There are considerable variations between the performances of different subjects. However, it is generally the case that the number of A and B grades and the average point score per subject are below what they should be. The main exceptions to this in 2004 were physical education, sociology and the small number of entries in French and German. A Level results in these subjects were well above average in 2004; they were above average in information and communication technology. By contrast, many students did not do as well as they should in English, business studies and chemistry where results were below average and in biology, mathematics and psychology where they were well below average.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	97.5 (92.1)	n/a (89.4)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	33.1 (32.1)	n/a (32.6)
Average point score per pupil	342.5 (340.5)	n/a (258.2)

There were 140 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

9. Achievement is satisfactory overall in the sixth form. Students make reasonable progress given their GCSE results, but no better. The main factors contributing to achievement in the main school are also evident in the sixth form. However, because a significant proportion of the students have not developed the learning skills needed for studying at this level, and teaching follows a narrow style that does not always challenge sufficiently, the highest standards are not consistently achieved by some students who are capable of this level. This is again reflected in the low proportion of A and B grades gained in several subjects. It is in subjects such as French and physical education where there is much challenging teaching that achievement is very good and students attain the highest standards.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attitudes to learning and the standard of behaviour are good throughout the school. Attendance and punctuality are very good in the main school and in the sixth form. Pupils' and students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and there are few exclusions.
- Whole school attendance is well above the national average and there are few unauthorised absences.
- Pupils and students arrive in good time for morning registration and timekeeping during the school day is very good.
- Some students have yet to develop the skills required to become independent and critical learners.
- Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good; their spiritual development continues to be satisfactory.

Commentary

10. This school enjoys a very good reputation and it strongly promotes the traditional values of manners, respect and courtesy. Academic and personal expectations are high and pupils try to meet these by being well behaved and working hard. Pupils are sociable and respect each other's points of view; they behave sensibly during breaks and lunchtimes and they are very polite and welcoming towards visitors. Pupils enjoy taking part in the many opportunities provided and extra-curricular activities involving physical education are particularly popular. Pupils with special educational needs also have positive attitudes to school. They speak highly of their teachers and are quick to offer each other help and support. However, opportunities for pupils to organise and take responsibility for their learning are limited. During lessons, pupils depend heavily upon their teacher and they are rarely asked to undertake research or to organise their learning resources. The previous inspection identified two minor issues; these were the need to extend pupils' spiritual and cultural development. Although pupils' cultural development is now good, their spiritual development continues to be satisfactory. However, the St. Martin's Day celebration held at the local church was an up-lifting experience for Year 7 pupils and celebrated the virtues of self-sacrifice and service to others.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1271	40	2
2	0	0
25	1	0

Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	8	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	2	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	8	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	6	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	1	0
No ethnic group recorded	352	2	0

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

11. Teachers retain tight control over pupils' behaviour during lessons. While many of the pupils accept this and comply, others become frustrated. The school is reluctant to exclude and sends those who are at risk of exclusion to the Green Room. The atmosphere within the Green Room is firm and pupils are unable to mix with their peers. However, it has an impact as few pupils are sent more than once and over the last year this facility has helped to halve the number of fixed period exclusions. There have been very few permanent exclusions. However, an analysis of the pre-inspection questionnaire shows that almost six out of ten pupils were dissatisfied with the overall standard of behaviour. During discussions, pupils were surprised by this and said that there was no particular problem. Inspectors agree; most of the pupils can be relied upon to behave well during lessons and their hard work and commitment is reflected in the very good examination results.
12. Pupils' attendance has been well above the national average for at least the last four years. Absences are closely monitored and the school strongly discourages parents from booking term time holidays. Follow-up procedures are rigorous and the number of unauthorised absences is around half the national average. Pupils' consistently high attendance helps them to make good progress in their learning. Despite traffic problems, very few pupils arrive after the start of the school day. In addition, the timetable has recently been amended to allow five minutes movement time between lessons. This helps to ensure that everyone is at the right place at the right time and that teachers and pupils alike are able to make the most of the time available.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.0	School data	0.5
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

Sixth form

13. Sixth form students are an amenable group of young people who are enjoying this phase of their education. Although some students are disappointed that their friends were not able to enter the sixth form, they are well motivated and keen to succeed. As in the main school, attendance is well above the national average and lessons start on time. During lessons, students usually behave sensibly and respect each other's points of view. However, some students do not sufficiently value courses such as general studies and they do not take the opportunities for intellectual debate as seriously as they should. There were two exclusions from the sixth form last year and one during the current school year; these were for inappropriate or violent behaviour.
14. Although students enjoy taking an active role in the life of the school, there are relatively few opportunities for them to actually do so. The school is aware of this and is intending to increase students' involvement in the rest of the school. In addition, students enter the sixth form with relatively weak independent study skills and not enough is done to help them to develop as self-directed learners. As a result, they do not take enough responsibility for their own learning and this is having an adverse impact on standards.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good overall. A significant proportion of teaching is good or better, but does not consistently ensure good achievement. Assessment procedures are rigorous. The school curriculum is satisfactory and is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities with particular strengths in sport. The accommodation has been substantially extended and, along with the resources available, it provides facilities that significantly support learning. The school ensures the welfare of the pupils and offers good support and guidance. There is a very strong partnership with parents. Community links also enhance learning and satisfactory links have been established with other schools and colleges.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and is more effective in Years 7 to 11 than in the sixth form where it is satisfactory. The assessment of pupils' work is good, but is not used consistently by all teachers to respond sharply to the needs of all pupils.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Many teachers are skilled practitioners and senior management is starting to utilise the methods they use to inform and improve the practice of others.
- Teaching in Years 7 to 11 does not prepare pupils for study in the sixth form by developing sufficiently the skills required for effective learning there.
- Pupils with special educational needs are catered for well, although teachers do not adapt their teaching sufficiently to take account of the learning needs of all pupils in their classes.

- Thorough and rigorous assessment procedures have been developed that support learning, but information is not always used effectively to inform teachers' lesson planning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 194 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4 (2%)	30 (15%)	77 (39%)	76 (39%)	3 (2%)	3 (2%)	1 (1%)

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

- Teaching has many qualities that support well the pupils' learning and achievement. About one lesson in every six is high quality. These lessons inspire and motivate pupils very effectively. However, there is scope for the development of teaching if the pupils' learning styles are to become broader and achievement is to rise. Teachers are skilled practitioners within a narrow range of styles with which they feel comfortable. Teaching has many good features that account for the good achievement of many pupils. The school is well placed to improve teaching and learning and has established a team of high quality practitioners to support this drive.
- Teachers focus sharply on key aspects of examination courses, providing the essential knowledge, information and skills to enable the pupils to become successful. While lessons have many positive characteristics, they can become too dominated by the teacher and lead to a passive approach to learning by the pupils. This works particularly well in getting very many pupils over the threshold of a grade C at GCSE. This style also ensures that pupils learn new skills and ideas well, particularly when they are regularly reinforced through revision. However, this results in insufficient challenge for those capable of high attainment in several subjects. Taken as a whole, this style does not prepare the pupils well for rigours of learning in the sixth form and accounts in many subjects for the lower achievement and standards at AS and A Level. Teachers do not focus sharply on developing a broad range of learning styles. Consequently, the pupils become over-dependent on their teachers and do not develop sufficiently the capacity to work independently and collaboratively. To a certain extent the school has recognised some of these shortcomings and has a core team of skilled practitioners now in place to focus on developing teachers' skills.
- A considerable proportion of teachers consistently teach lessons that have many good qualities. These teachers demonstrate their high expectations of work and behaviour through the challenge and excitement they bring to their lessons. They engage the pupils in the learning process and generate pace so that time seems to pass quickly. The pupils respond well by concentrating and working hard on tasks set. The very best teachers use questioning skilfully to probe and extend the pupils and to check their understanding. These lessons are carefully planned, well organised and focus sharply on the pupils' learning. They use a variety of activities such as group and discussion work, investigation and research. New technology is also used well to enliven teaching and support learning. It is these characteristics that are missing in otherwise quite competently taught lessons. Some of the very best teaching takes place in history, where each lesson starts with a question for the pupils to unravel.

Immersing pupils in the language is a highly effective technique employed in French and German. The styles adopted in Years 10 and 11 in GCSE physical education and in religious education also develop well the pupils' learning skills. The school is in the process of revisiting its strategies for managing the behaviour of pupils in lessons. Most teachers have successfully established a calm and purposeful atmosphere in their classrooms and pupils respond well, enabling the time available to be used productively.

18. The assessment of pupils' work is thorough and in many cases offers constructive help to enable them to improve. The best marking and target-setting are used well as a vehicle for raising the standards of pupils' work and enabling them to see how they can be successful in examinations. Feedback in lessons is also often clear and useful. However, there is scope to improve the effectiveness with which lesson objectives and assessment criteria are shared with pupils and then revisited so that the pupils can take a more active role in assessing their progress. Where assessment information is used well it informs teachers' lesson planning and supports the pupils' learning. However, this is far from consistent across the school and teachers do not always take into account the prior learning of all pupils in their classes. This results in some cases in the repetition of work that has been mastered in earlier years because the scheme or course textbook dictates so. Some teachers have also not sufficiently recognised that boys fall behind girls in Years 10 and 11 and have not taken effective action to remedy this problem.
19. The majority of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is to classes organised into groups based on their prior attainment, largely but not exclusively based on English and mathematics. However, there is insufficient acknowledgement that this setting arrangement still means that there is a wide variety of learning needs in each class. Teachers in the lowest sets are more skilled at adapting to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs. Teaching assistants also provide effective support, particularly for pupils with specific difficulties, enabling them to access lessons and to achieve. The small numbers of pupils learning English as an additional language receive suitable support that enables them to develop English language skills to such an extent that their access to the curriculum is secure and their skills support their learning in all subjects.

Sixth form

20. Many of the best qualities of teaching in Years 7 to 11 are also evident in the sixth form. However, some of the same narrowness of styles and methods is also to be seen. The most effective teaching is searching and challenging with a high level of academic rigour. Teachers use their command of the subject to plan well and to communicate their high expectations of the students. These teachers have very good techniques for developing learning strategies within the students. New technology is used to good effect as in the main school. However, there is a smaller proportion of good and better teaching in the sixth form than in the rest of the school. The most effective sixth form teaching is in French, physical education and sociology. The students learn well in these subjects and they are challenged through the variety of methods used.

21. There has been a drive to develop greater independence within the students, although this focus is seen by many teachers as expecting the students to prepare work outside lessons. While this has considerable value, it does not fully tackle the weakness in the students' learning. It is a general feature that lessons are competently taught but in a rather mundane manner. They are dominated too much by the teacher, who imparts knowledge and then requires the students to practise skills. This consolidates learning but does not consistently deepen understanding. In particular, it does not develop sufficiently the skills that support achievement and learning such as those of enquiry, discussion, initiative and taking responsibility for their learning.
22. Departments have clear guidelines for assessing students' progress. Marking is thorough in most subjects and helps the students to see how they can improve their work. However, the information and the minimum target grades for students are not used effectively to ensure that there is high challenge and motivation for the students. There is also not a consistent requirement to involve students in evaluating their own progress. This accounts in part for the comparatively low proportion of A and B grades at A Level in many subjects.

The curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory, enabling good achievement in most subjects and supporting well the students' personal development. There are good opportunities for enrichment outside of lessons. Accommodation and resources are good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Staffing is very good in both the main school and the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum enables pupils to make good progress in most subjects but there are limitations in the development of key learning skills.
- A good range of vocational courses has been introduced for some pupils in Years 10 and 11, but partnerships have not been established to ensure continuity of learning for those who do not meet the sixth form entry requirements.
- A wide range of advanced level courses is provided in the sixth form, but there is no provision at lower levels.
- Access to a wide range of sporting activity and the high levels of participation make a major contribution to the pupils' personal development.

Commentary

23. Statutory requirements are met, as are examination requirements for courses, in Years 10 and 11. There are some good examples of pupils using and developing their literacy and numeracy, as well as their information and communication technology capability through subjects. However, this is not guaranteed for all pupils, and is dependent on who teaches them. Other key learning skills, especially those associated with developing independence and enabling pupils to take responsibility for their own learning are not systematically and coherently developed throughout the curriculum. This is limiting the proportion of the highest grades awarded at GCSE and is not preparing pupils well for study in the sixth form.

24. Some innovative use of new technology is being developed, with nominated teachers taking a lead in curriculum areas. Early success demonstrates clearly the positive impact that this can have in raising achievement and the major contribution that can be made to developing the learning skills highlighted above.
25. Pupils study personal and social education in rotation with citizenship and careers under the title of 'civics'. This programme is helping to ensure that the pupils' personal development is good. A good range of enrichment activities also supports this development, with a very strong contribution from sport. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to develop this further into a real interest and excitement about a subject or to transform the learning experiences of a wide range of pupils. The school has identified gifted pupils, but not yet developed a coherent programme for their development; talented pupils are recognised in some subjects such as physical education and art and design, but not coherently across the school.
26. There has been much modification and development of the curriculum, including the introduction of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. However, access to some of these courses is limited to particular cohorts of pupils. The school also makes quite extensive use of work-place learning, with many Year 11 pupils having an extended work experience. There are effective working relationships with other local providers, so that some pupils benefit from an increased flexibility programme. Partnerships with other institutions are not sufficiently developed to ensure that there is continuity of courses and learning for those students who do not achieve the high entry requirements for the sixth form.
27. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. Pupils are well provided for and the school's procedures comply with the national Code of Practice. A small number of pupils in Year 7 are withdrawn from lessons in order to enable them to participate in 'catch-up' classes. This takes place at appropriate times and does not hinder their access to the full range of curriculum opportunities. Individual education plans are reviewed each term, with one formal review each year, to ensure that these targets reflect the progress that pupils have made. Pupils are mostly taught in groups based on their attainment in previous assessments. This is enabling a broad matching of work to the pupils' needs, but in some lessons the work then provided is not planned well enough to meet the full range of needs within the group.
28. The school has undertaken a large-scale building programme over the past few years that has created some excellent facilities, including a well used learning resource centre. Some of the older areas of the school suffer from general wear and tear and await decoration and refurbishment on the school's five-year rolling programme. Overall, accommodation is good and the school is forward looking and creative with its plans to enhance facilities. Resources for supporting teaching and learning are also good, with no significant shortages. New technology resources are excellent, although use is limited in some subject areas such as science.
29. There has been a high turnover of teachers over the past two years, as posts of greater responsibility have been sought elsewhere. Good personnel management has ensured that the school has its full complement of qualified teachers, who very largely teach their specialist subject. Teachers are well aided by support staff and the school

has made good progress in remodelling of the workforce by extending the role of teaching and administrative assistants.

Sixth form

30. The large number of students in the sixth form enables the school to offer a wide range of AS and A Level courses. These courses meet well the needs and aspirations of those students who attain the entry requirements. The majority of students continue their studies into higher education. The range of options for students who may prefer or be better suited to vocational courses is limited, but the sixth form improvement plan outlines intentions to strengthen provision and to enhance progression from vocational courses in Year 11.
31. Careers guidance is effective, with continued access to impartial advice. Preparation for university entrance is especially strong. Students follow a general studies programme, which leads to an A Level qualification. Many of these lessons make students think about a wide range of issues and require them to reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs. Students generally respond well in the lessons, but many place little value on them and consequently the impact is limited to the outcomes of the individual lessons.
32. The teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to teach the curriculum offered, although the learning strategies employed by them do not always result in the highest possible outcomes. The sixth form accommodation is very good. Students have access to a good number of dedicated teaching rooms, as well as a library and computer suite, although the lack of an art studio specifically for sixth form students limits the time they can devote to their work.

Care, guidance and support

Welfare, care and health and safety arrangements are good. The school provides good support, advice and guidance and involves pupils and students well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students are well looked after during the school day.
- Teachers provide good academic and personal support and guidance.
- Pupils make informed choices when selecting their options for Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, but partnership links with further education providers are limited.
- Induction procedures are thorough and sensitive to pupils' needs.
- The school encourages pupils and students to voice their views and acts upon them whenever it can.

Commentary

33. Members of staff work closely to ensure that pupils receive good personal care and support. The school is responsive to pupils' needs and individuals who are experiencing particular difficulties may be referred to external specialist agencies or the school counsellor. Child protection, medical and health and safety procedures are

thorough; members of staff are appropriately trained and they fully understand their responsibilities.

34. During discussions, pupils say they know how well they are doing in their work and know what they have to do in order to improve. Pupils also say that their teachers are approachable and that they would feel able to ask for extra help, should the need arise. The school is in the early stages of altering the way in which it monitors and reports pupils' progress. Twice a year, pupils are to be invited to a progress review meeting with their form tutor. Parents are also able to come along and, using information provided by the individual subject teachers, each pupil's progress is reviewed. This process allows pupils to reflect upon how well they are doing and helps them to plan for the future.
35. There is a very good range of revision classes and underachieving pupils in Year 11 may receive individual support from their assigned learning mentor. This ensures that these pupils are helped to achieve as well as they possibly can. The learning support team also involves pupils in monitoring their progress, through the reviews of their individual education plans and attendance at the annual reviews of their statements. All members of staff are familiar with the pupils' needs and competent learning support assistants support them well during lessons.
36. Pupils receive detailed information about the courses they can follow in Years 10 and 11. Links with the world of industry and commerce are good and they help to enrich pupils' breadth of experience. Year 10 pupils undertake work experience placements and these provide a valuable insight into the world of work. However, around half the pupils in Year 11 do not achieve the results that they need for admission to sixth form and they have to leave at the end of Year 11. These pupils are each offered an interview with a careers adviser and this helps to ensure that they are in a position to make informed choices about their future. However, the school has yet to develop full partnership links with further education colleges in order to ensure full continuity of educational provision between the ages of 14 and 19 years for these pupils.
37. Transfer arrangements are well-planned and sensitive to pupils' individual needs. Members of staff visit around half the contributing primary schools and there is also an 'Ice Breaker' disco for Year 6 pupils. Pupils also attend two summer term transfer days, during which they undertake tests and 'taster' lessons with their new teachers. These opportunities help pupils to get to know each other at an early stage. On the first day of the autumn term, incoming Year 7 pupils have the school to themselves for the first few hours and this helps them to feel more confident before the rest of the school arrives.
38. Pupils are pleased with the way in which the school seeks and responds to their opinions and suggestions. Every year, pupils in Years 7 and 9 complete a questionnaire about various aspects of school life. In addition, pupils can express their views through the school council and raise money by organising non-uniform days. Pupils have recently been able to amend the school uniform and have funded the installation of radio-controlled clocks in order to standardise timekeeping across the school.

Sixth form

39. During discussions, students say they are pleased with the educational and personal guidance they receive within the sixth form. As in the main school, procedures for reviewing students' progress have recently been reviewed. Each half term, tutors will hold individual discussions with each student in their tutor group, during which they will review the progress that is being made in the subjects studied. If necessary, students may be offered additional teaching or referred to careers advisers.
40. A high proportion of those who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire criticised the advice they received about sixth form courses and the advice on what they should do when they leave school. Inspectors disagree with these concerns. During the summer term of Year 11, pupils can attend 'taster' lessons in various sixth form subjects and a good range of external speakers come in to school to talk about future options. Students agree that careers information and advice are available for those who seek it. They also praise the head of sixth form's knowledge about higher education institutions and courses, and the quality of the advice he gives.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are very good. Links with the community are good and links with other schools and colleges are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school actively seeks and responds very well to parents' suggestions and concerns.
- Parents are very well informed about school life and their children's progress.
- Parents provide very good support for their children's learning.
- Strong links with the community and local businesses enhance pupils' personal development well.

Commentary

41. The school is very interested in parents' views and encourages them to be open and frank if they have any requests or suggestions. Each year, the parents of pupils in Years 7 and 9 are asked to complete a questionnaire that asks for their views on various aspects of school life. Almost all of the parents return their form and the school responds individually to everyone who took part. In response to parents' concerns, a parent link manager has been appointed who represents the first point of contact for all parents. Parents are very pleased with this system and any points they raise are addressed, if not resolved, within 24 hours. The school recently changed its systems and is now inviting all parents to attend their child's twice-annual progress review meetings. They are now able to speak directly with their child's form tutor and individual subject teachers will always meet a parent if they need more specific information. There is also an autumn term meeting with the form tutor for the parents of pupils in Year 7 and the traditional annual consultation evening continues for parents of Year 11 pupils. The parents of pupils with special educational needs are also kept very well informed of their children's progress and personal development. Parents can access information about their children through the school website and regular newsletters and leaflets keep them up-to-date with school developments.

42. The school is regularly over-subscribed and parents provide very good support for its work. Views expressed through the pre-inspection meeting and questionnaires were very positive; indeed, there is little about the school that parents would like to change. Parents provide very generous financial support and the school association raises very significant sums of money. These funds are used to improve the school environment and provide additional learning resources. Parents also do everything they can to ensure that their children attend regularly and that they arrive on time. Their support is reflected in pupils' high attendance and very good punctuality at the start of the school day.
43. This school's status as a specialist technology college creates many opportunities to engage and interest pupils, parents and the wider community. For example, partner primary schools receive specialist equipment and teachers are pleased to share their expertise. Selected pupils in Year 6 may also attend literacy or numeracy summer schools and there are numerous sporting events that help pupils to get to know each other at an early stage. These activities help incoming pupils to become more familiar with the school and help to raise standards at the start of Year 7. Community links are especially strong in subjects such as business studies. Pupils of all ages take part in community projects and competitions. For example, Year 10 pupils have been involved in Young Enterprise business day that was organised by the Ford motor company. Several pupils in Years 10 and 11 undertake work-based training at a local college. However, the school has yet to establish close partnership links with the further education colleges it serves.

Sixth form

44. There are extensive links with higher education that inform and support students when making decisions about their next steps. The school is particularly keen to support those students and their parents whose families do not have a history of accessing higher education. Links with businesses, such as in supporting the Insight into Management course towards the end of Year 12, continue to inform career choice and develop important skills.
45. Attempts have been made to extend further the range of courses offered through collaboration with other schools, but with small numbers of students taking advantage of this collaboration. Nevertheless, the sixth form improvement plan demonstrates the school's intentions to continue to seek partners in strengthening its advanced vocational provision.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. Governance is satisfactory and improving. The headteacher and other key staff provide good leadership. Management systems are effective.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The effective leadership of the headteacher has been instrumental in raising the profile and expectations of the school.

- The role of the governing body is developing but governors do not have robust procedures for gaining an independent view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Leadership is committed and strong but has not effectively tackled shortcomings in aspects of teaching and learning that limit achievement particularly of sixth form students.
- The role of middle leadership is developing but has scope for greater consistency of approach.
- The induction of new teachers is highly effective and is a significant feature of the school's strategy for ensuring it retains and develops teachers of the best quality.

Commentary

46. The headteacher has been instrumental in driving forward the expansion of the school in recent years and in securing its high profile in the area. He has ensured that the public image of the school is extremely favourable and has secured considerable funding to support the school's expansion. He is supported well in this by an effective team of senior leaders who are becoming more focused on the impact of pupils' learning on their subsequent achievement. Procedures to monitor the work of teachers and to hold departments to account for their provision and standards are becoming increasingly rigorous. However, there is not consistently a realistic evaluation of the quality of provision throughout the school. This has led to some important shortcomings neither being analysed sufficiently nor their remedy given full attention. This is particularly the case over the inconsistent approach to tackling the widening gender gap at GCSE and the impact on achievement of the narrow range of teaching styles utilised by many teachers. The focus on improving teaching and learning is now built around a strong team of skilled practitioners, although there is scope to ensure that the focus is firmly on improving learning.
47. The process of devolving leadership to faculty and department heads is underway. This is already unlocking the potential of many staff who give a clear direction to their subjects based on an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. However, there is considerable variation in the ability and skills of staff to fulfil this role to the best effect. The ability to interpret data accurately is not shared by all at this level, although there is a strong willingness to develop these skills and a commitment to raising standards. Currently, not all subject leaders are clear where the weaknesses lie in their areas and hence the steps needed to secure rising achievement. Management systems generally work well, and the school has invested considerable funds in extending the support staff framework to remove routine administrative tasks from the workload of teachers. Systems for managing the performance of teachers and other staff are securely in place.
48. The governing body acknowledges that it has been through an unsettling period that limited the effectiveness of its function. It has come through this strengthened but still has some way to go before it can be fully effective. Statutory responsibilities are largely met. However, the delay in introducing a policy on race equality and further inadequacies in ethnic background data held by the school mean that it is not possible to monitor accurately the implementation of the policy. Furthermore, although governors require teachers to undertake a daily act of worship through a thought for the day, this is poorly done by some, with the result that statutory requirements are

only just met overall. Governors share in preparing plans for the school in a consultative capacity but do not take a longer-term strategic overview of its future direction. The school improvement plan is a thorough document. However, it does not clearly identify the key priorities for raising achievement and resource implications are not accurately quantified. There is limited governor involvement in monitoring its implementation, other than by information provided by the senior leadership team. While governors are very supportive and more effectively challenge the headteacher and senior management, they do not have sufficient independence to be able to call the school fully to account for its work.

49. Members of staff influence the work of other schools in many ways. For example, they give direct support through both the technology college and its Beacon school status. However, the quality of provision in technology has been of some concern because of staffing difficulties which now seem to have been resolved.
50. The school has a deserved reputation for its induction arrangements for new teachers, particularly those new to the profession. The one-year induction requirement is automatically extended to two so that the early professional development of these teachers can be carefully monitored. The quality of the support is such that many rapidly become amongst the most effective teachers in the school and are ready for promotion earlier than might otherwise be expected. The further development of all staff is given careful consideration and new methods such as coaching individuals and departments have been introduced to improve teaching and learning where shortcomings have been identified.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	6,021,042	Balance from previous year	134,375
Total expenditure	5,855,932	Balance carried forward to the next	299,485
Expenditure per pupil	3,434		

Sixth form

51. The sixth form team of heads of year and tutors are well led and they provide an effective framework for managing provision and supporting students. A comprehensive improvement plan is in place, which accurately reflects the developments necessary to improve provision further. Some of these are already having a positive impact. For example, a more structured tutorial programme is supporting the students' personal development more strongly and the sixth form council is taking a more active role in developments.
52. Critically, the head of sixth form has also identified, as a result of monitoring lessons, the need to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in this area of the school. Too few subject leaders have identified what constitutes an appropriate challenge for individual or groups of students and the teaching and learning strategies that are required to achieve these. Consequently, while the head of sixth form provides good leadership and management, limitations in the impact of subject

leaders on the progress made by students and their resulting achievement limits the overall quality to satisfactory.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING (WRL)

Provision for work-related learning is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Careers guidance and work experience are well organised and have a significant impact on pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Extensive links with individuals and organisations make a strong contribution to pupils' learning, although they are not always exploited fully.
- Vocational courses are a very strong element for pupils following one of the curriculum pathways in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

53. There is an effective careers programme that coherently develops the pupils' experiences and skills as they progress through the school. This, coupled with effective independent support and guidance which is carefully targeted at those most in need, enables pupils to make informed choices. Current sixth form students were particularly complimentary about the range of individuals who came into school to talk to them about their occupations when they were in Year 11. The work experience programme is well managed. Effective preparation for and debriefing from the placement ensures that pupils are able to think about and reflect on the experience, maximising the learning opportunity. This is also picked up in subjects such as English, where the placement is used as the basis of an activity. Extended periods of work experience form an important part of the learning programme for many pupils in Year 11, with over fifty pupils benefiting this year.
54. The school has many and varied links with individuals and organisations that are used to enrich the curriculum and provide a vehicle for developing the pupils' experience and understanding of broader aspects of the world of work. Many of these are connected with the school's role as a specialist technology college. However, these links are not always fully exploited or extended so that they are not having a coherent and consistent influence on the provision for all pupils.
55. Work related learning is a very strong focus for pupils following one of the curriculum pathways in Years 10 and 11. This is through the vocational courses followed and especially the ASDAN course which focuses well on developing the skills and experiences that will enable the pupils to be successful after they leave school. Visits to local businesses are an integral part of provision. A small group of students also benefit from vocationally orientated courses at the local college. More generally, some subjects such as business studies and modern foreign languages provide students with contexts for their learning which are related to various aspects of work. However, this is not especially widespread and subjects are not fully aware of the contributions that they should be making towards developing underpinning skills such as team work and in encouraging students to become independent and take

responsibility for their learning. No formal audit of provision has taken place to provide departments with a very clear outline of what is expected from them.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils enter Year 7 with attainment well above average and they maintain this standard as they move up through the school to take the Year 9 tests and the GCSE examinations.
- A good range of reading and writing opportunities in Years 7 to 9 has some excellent outcomes in lively, imaginative writing.
- The marking of pupils' work is not always sufficiently frequent or informative.
- Pupils do not take part in a wide enough range of speaking activities, including discussion, presentation and drama.
- The English team is well led and ready to share ideas and good practice.

Commentary

56. In 2004, results in the national tests taken in Year 9 were well above the national average for 2003, as is expected when a high percentage of entrants to the school had already attained the expected Year 9 level. There was particularly good attainment at the higher levels. This good achievement is reflected in much of the work seen during the inspection.
57. Pupils achieve well in response to interesting material and challenging tasks. In lessons observed in Years 7 to 9, keen learners were enjoying good teaching which extended their reading and stimulated some excellent writing. The lively poems written by Year 7 pupils about their first day at school demonstrated the good writing skills which many new pupils bring with them. Skilful development of these was shown in the powerful verses on tornadoes written in a Year 8 lesson, and in the sensitive work on the poetry of the First World War produced by pupils in Year 9. Imaginative use of new technology was noted in some of this work. However, not enough is being done to help pupils develop a range of oral skills. Teachers' expositions and introductions are well-prepared and thought-provoking; useful pair work often follows, leading to questions from teachers and answers from pupils. However, opportunities are missed for sustained whole-class discussion, pupil presentations, improvisations or preparation of poems or scripts for performance.
58. There is scope to improve the marking of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9, particularly now that the department has identified writing in these years as an area for further improvement. Major assignments are well assessed and pupils have good understanding of their levels. What is missing in many exercise books is the more regular commenting on pupils' work which establishes an ongoing dialogue between teacher and writer and helps pupils to identify strengths, weaknesses and targets.

59. In Years 10 and 11, teachers and pupils work hard to understand and meet the criteria for success in the English and English literature examinations and there is good achievement at this stage. The entry rate for both examinations is well above the national, and pupils at all levels are expected to take the literature paper. In 2004, although the percentage of pupils attaining A*-C grades in English was above the national average, attainment at the higher levels was below average and had dropped from the previous year, with no value added. However, in literature results were well above average, with the percentage of A* and A grades double the national figure and boys doing as well as girls; this represented good progress for both.
60. Here, as in Years 7 to 9, the system of setting allows pupils to work at varying paces and with appropriate support. The system has strengths, and most pupils in the lower sets appreciate the security and thoughtful individual help the smaller classes provide. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. They are, nevertheless, missing exposure to the range of ideas which characterise the best work in higher groups and their enjoyment of the subject is to some extent limited by this. In response to examination pressures, teaching in Years 10 and 11 becomes more teacher-directed, closely focused on the set texts and tasks, with less emphasis on more general reading and awareness. Work folders and notebooks contain writing which indicates very good understanding of the literature texts and skills in analysis and commentary. However, library records show that general book borrowing declines sharply in Years 10 and 11, especially for boys. Although the study of media texts is part of English work at this stage, no daily newspapers are available in the main school library nor has any teacher or pupil of English suggested that these should be there. The absence of regular extra-curricular activities for pupils at this stage also indicates that not enough attention is being given to extending pupils' range of ideas and interests.
61. Leadership and management of the subject are good, and ensure a sense of common purpose in the department. Newcomers feel well supported. Good schemes of work, departmental records and minutes show that teachers are encouraged to share ideas, evaluate practice and analyse outcomes. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. There is now scope for a comparative review of teaching and learning styles and the development of a wider range of English activities both within and outside the classroom.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

62. Pupils enter the school with well above average levels of literacy. However, little emphasis has been given to the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy across the school. Departments have not been required to produce policies for literacy development nor is there evidence of liaison with primary schools for the evaluation and improvement of literacy.
63. Standards of literacy are good or better in all subject areas. Attainment and achievement in subjects across the curriculum are not impaired by inadequate levels of literacy and pupils' skills in reading and writing contribute to the good work they do in many subjects. In physical education, reading, writing and speech skills are outstanding. However, failure to correct spelling mistakes was noted in music; in

science and geography there is not a great deal of encouragement to read or extend vocabulary. There are not enough opportunities for extended writing in religious education in Years 7 to 9. In design and technology, where any technical errors are consistently corrected, more challenging lessons would be appropriate to pupils' literacy abilities. Good literacy skills enable pupils in information and communication technology to have access to the on-line resources which are the basis of most courses.

French and German

Provision in French and German is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very high level of achievement supports a similar very high level of standards.
- The leadership and management of the team ensure expectations are very high.
- Teachers' command of their languages provides a very good model but is underused.
- The quality of teaching enhances complex language development but pupils do not use information and communication technology sufficiently.

Commentary

64. The very good improvement since the previous inspection is reflected across the work of the department. Standards are now above average at the end of Year 9 and well above average at Year 11 in both French and German. These standards have been maintained over recent years and GCSE results have been consistently well above average in both French and German. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11.
65. This success is directly due to the very good teaching which pupils receive, especially in preparation for their GCSE examinations. Teachers' command of their languages is extremely proficient and where they use them extensively in lessons, pupils' own pronunciation and accents reflect this. Pupils achieve less well when they do not have enough exposure to the languages to develop fully their own listening and speaking skills. Teachers also have very high expectations of their classes, especially of more able groups and plan thoroughly to lead learners through from simple beginnings to very complex language which in turn results in a very high proportion gaining a grade A* or A in GCSE examinations. The quality of challenge is less for lower ability groups which leads to some of these pupils achieving less well in relation to their ability. Pupils know exactly how to complete tasks because teachers provide very good models for them to follow.
66. The very high quality of marking and targets for further improvement ensure that learners know how to reach the next level of competence although teachers' application of levels of attainment at the end of Year 9 is too inaccurate. In a very small minority of lessons, the management of pupils' behaviour allows for very little learning to take place. In some lessons, the variation in methods and tasks is aimed only at those pupils who have special educational needs and is underdeveloped for the other learners who as a consequence do not have tasks which cater for their needs.

67. The department is very effectively led and managed by a head of faculty who has created a cohesive team whose members are committed to raising standards further and fostering enjoyment in language learning. However, the role of the head of German is underexploited. Another factor which supports learning very well is the amount of contact pupils have with mother tongue speakers of both languages but pupils' under-use of information and communication technology does not allow for their own further independent language development.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- New members of staff are inducted well into the work of the department.
- Teaching is well planned to produce well above average examination performance.
- Assessment is used well to identify pupils who need extra support.
- The concentration on examination performance is limiting the enrichment and broadening of the curriculum.
- Insufficient use is made of new technology to enhance teaching and learning.

Commentary

68. Pupils' achievement is good and standards are well above average by Years 9 and 11. Test and examination results have risen faster than nationally since the last inspection. Both Year 9 test results and GCSE examination results have been consistently well above average with boys and girls gaining similar results overall at both stages. Year 9 test results rose in 2004, while GCSE results remained well above average despite a very small fall in performance. Given the well above average attainment of the pupils on entry to the school, these results still represented good progress for the majority of pupils.
69. Across the school good relationships in classes, good class control and well-behaved pupils create a secure ethos in which pupils' learning is good. All aspects of mathematics are covered thoroughly at levels offering appropriate challenge. For example, the lowest ability Year 7 set dealt successfully with work on averages, while the highest ability Year 11 class tackled A Level questions with confidence. Books are well marked and useful homework is a strong feature. The good teaching is based on well-planned lessons that make good use of time. Topics are covered very thoroughly. Pupils respond to their teachers' demands well. This positive attitude to work is reflected in their books which show good quantities of work. However, teaching is focused very narrowly on the requirements of the examinations. Work of earlier years is over-revised. The lack of variety in teaching styles as well as the limited use of new technology as an aid to teaching and learning means that teachers are failing to provide the enrichment of the mathematical experience which can encourage pupils to enjoy the subject. Good use of assessment identifies those pupils who would benefit from extra support, which is freely given. Support provided to pupils with special educational needs is effective in enabling them to make good

progress. The members of staff concerned have a good knowledge of individual pupils' needs.

70. Staff recruitment is well managed, resulting in a large team of qualified teachers in the department. Mentoring by established colleagues is one element of an effective staff induction process. Monitoring of teaching and learning is now a regular feature of the department's work. Improvements since the previous inspection have been satisfactory. Overall leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department is a good role model who monitors teaching regularly and gives teachers feedback on how to improve the quality of their work. A development plan has been produced that puts pupil attainment central to the department's work. However, the plan is limited to the immediate future and does not have clear resource implications detailed so its impact on the work of the department is limited. Pupils' work is monitored appropriately and their progress against targets assessed regularly. One recent consequence of this was to change the examinations used. Activities are delegated effectively with staff clear about their roles within the department. One shortcoming is that opportunities to develop teaching styles through good curriculum links with primary schools are not being realised.

Mathematics across the curriculum

71. The recent staffing appointments that have been made to tackle the development of mathematics and numeracy across the curriculum have yet to make a significant impact. At present there are suitable opportunities to develop mathematical skills through practice offered by the various curriculum areas, but there is some inconsistency within subjects. The pupils' ability to deal with the mathematical content of subjects is well above average and contributes to their progress in other subjects. For example, pupils deal well with the mathematical and graphical requirements of the design process in design and technology. Their number skills enhance spreadsheet work in information and communication technology and handling formulae in science. Their skills enable the pupils to access all areas of the curriculum confidently.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are not achieving as well as they should partly because the needs of the most able, in particular girls, and also the least able pupils are not catered for sufficiently.
- The very good relationships between teachers and their pupils provide a secure environment in which learning can take place.
- There is insufficient use of new technology within lessons to support pupils' achievement and learning.

Commentary

72. Overall improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Pupils' attainment has improved in line with national trends but the achievement of some groups is

insufficient given their standards on entry to the school. Overall achievement is satisfactory and pupils make satisfactory progress during their time in school. The trend in performance is generally upwards and standards are in line with national averages throughout the school. In Year 9 and Year 11, test and examination results as well as current standards are well above the national average but are barely average when compared to similar schools. However, within this overall judgement there are variations. The most able pupils achieve less well as shown by the low number of A* and A grades at GCSE. Similarly significantly fewer pupils attained the highest level in Year 9 tests in science than in mathematics; this was particularly marked in the case of girls. The least able make less progress than expected and receive insufficient in-class support to enable them to maximise their learning.

73. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The best achievement is in lessons where teaching and learning are good. In these lessons the teacher takes account of the pupils' ability and learning styles and provides opportunities for pupils to develop independently. These lessons are characterised by faster pace and effective interventions by the teacher. However, where teaching and learning are at best satisfactory the lessons are predominantly teacher led with whole class questioning. There is little variety in teaching strategies and so few opportunities for pupils to develop and extend their thinking. In some groups where girls are in the minority they remain quiet and detached while boys answer most of the teacher's questions. The National Key Stage 3 strategy has not had sufficient impact on teaching styles, although some training has taken place.
74. In the majority of lessons teachers manage the behaviour of pupils well. Teacher-pupil relationships are often very good and provide a secure environment for learning to take place. Books are regularly marked and comments on effort and organisation are made; target sheets are now regularly completed for Years 7 and 8; however, most teachers give insufficient guidance to pupils about how to improve the content and level of their work.
75. Management and leadership of the department are satisfactory. Most teachers have some role in the management; they work well as a team, share their expertise and contribute to the development of teaching in the department. However, the majority of teachers are relatively inexperienced and several still need further support and guidance on how to gain the best from the pupils. There are good arrangements for monitoring and supporting the work of the department, but there is insufficient evaluation of the outcomes to bring about fundamental change in practice. There is scope for assessment data from external examinations to be used more robustly in the department to inform improvements in teaching and learning and raise achievement.
76. The use of new technology by pupils and teachers within lessons is underdeveloped. This is in part due to limited availability of resources and is insufficient to impact on pupils' achievement and learning. There are currently too few opportunities for pupils to experience science activities outside the classroom and the lack of science visits across the school limits access to and enrichment of the wider curriculum.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Resources are very good; the number of computers in the school is above average and there is a significant and growing number of interactive whiteboards in use.
- "E-learning" resources are very good and effectively used to enhance learning and assessment.
- The GNVQ examination course is not appropriate for all of the pupils who are required to take it.

Commentary

77. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. All pupils now follow either a short GCSE course or an intermediate GNVQ course in information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11. Results in 2004 at GCSE, which is taken by the majority of pupils were above the 2003 national average. Overall results at GNVQ intermediate level, taken by 50 pupils, were well below last year's national average. One reason for this is that the course is not appropriate for pupils who will not attain at least a C grade and a high percentage of entrants gained no grade at all.
78. All pupils have information and communication technology lessons in Years 7 to 9 where achievement is good, as is the quality of teaching and learning. The standard of pupils' work is above average by Year 9. Pupils cover all of the required aspects of information and communication technology in appropriate depth and are able to transfer their knowledge and skills to enhance learning in other subjects. Pupils have a positive attitude towards the subject and respond well to the good and sometimes very good teaching. Learning activities are challenging and designed to cater for all abilities. These factors help to ensure that achievement is good overall and often very good for pupils with special educational needs who are well supported by their teachers with well-prepared learning resources.
79. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory and standards are average overall by Year 11. Teaching is satisfactory overall in these years, although there is some variation in the effectiveness of classroom management in the GCSE course, which impairs learning in some lessons. The better standards attained by girls are to some extent a reflection of a more positive and consistent approach to work. The layout of some teaching rooms is a contributory factor in making classroom management more difficult. A wide range of standards was seen in GNVQ work. Over half was at least average but a significant minority was below average even though their achievement was often good. Much teaching in this course is good and less able pupils are well supported. However, the assessment requirements of this course make it inappropriate for a significant number of pupils who are directed to take it. The department is currently assessing the appropriateness of alternative assessment for the least able pupils. In all years, much of the scheme of work uses very effective Internet-based learning resources, which can also be used by pupils at home. The on-line assessment system, which is an integral element, keeps teachers and pupils up to date with progress. Parents are also able to access this work at home and keep track of progress.

80. Leadership is satisfactory. Planning for further development is diligent and thorough and there is an overall vision for the future. The large numbers of pupils having lessons in all years necessitates the use of a large teaching team. The team includes some non-specialists and new teachers. Their work is monitored. They receive satisfactory support and are able to use good on-line resources and assessment facilities. Management is good. Strategic planning has been effective in ensuring the use of new technology pervades most aspects of the curriculum. The ability to offer an examination course to all pupils is supported by a high level of resources and a reliable and well-maintained infrastructure. The learning resource centre is very well planned and equipped. The school also provides very good access to computers for pupils outside lesson times throughout the day and after school. This enables pupils to continue their examination coursework in school.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

81. The use of information and communication technology across the curriculum is good, but inconsistent between teachers in the same subject area. The exception to this is science where use is unsatisfactory. There has been good improvement in departmental resources and in the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum. The good use of new technology is supported by the higher than average number of computers for a school of this size and the good general skill capability which pupils develop in information and communication technology lessons. This enables subject teachers to plan for the use of new technology without having to teach more than the aspects, which apply to a specific subject. Computer rooms are located throughout the school and there are good facilities with specialist equipment in most departments. The increasing numbers of interactive whiteboards in the school are used effectively to enhance teaching and learning and to provide instant access to both Internet-based resources and up-to-date subject information. The planning for and co-ordination of information and communication technology across the curriculum is effective. The co-ordinator is aware of weak areas and plans are in hand to improve provision and use where necessary. Pupils have good access to school equipment outside lesson times during the day and after school in the very well equipped learning resource centre. Pupils also have access to a good range of learning resources for a range of subjects via the Internet, which they can also use at home. This enables parents to see the work in hand as well as the assessment levels which are attained for specific pieces of work.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective planning for examinations, and good responses from pupils, result in above average standards in Years 10 and 11.
- The subject is communicated to pupils effectively by experienced teachers.
- The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they might in Years 7 to 9.
- Support for lower-attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 is not systematic.

- Good leadership results in good teamwork and constant striving for success.

Commentary

82. Overall standards are above average by Years 9 and 11 and achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good overall with the best examples seen in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results in 2004 were well above national averages with boys performing better than girls, who did not achieve all that they were capable of in their coursework. Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 because they have a positive attitude to their learning and enjoy the interesting teaching. Good teaching is characterised by teachers who have a very good command of their subject and plan carefully using good quality resources to enthuse their pupils. In the best lessons, individual needs are well catered for, pupils are expected to work hard and lesson summaries are effective in demonstrating good understanding. A Year 10 lesson on the Kobe earthquake worked well because of very positive pupil attitudes, with collaborative work being a particularly good feature. However, this lesson would have benefited from greater challenge because the task was too structured to allow the higher-attaining pupils to make links between the causes and effects themselves.
83. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are often only satisfactory. This results in only satisfactory achievement. Attainment recorded by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2003 was well above national averages. Although assessment is thorough, constructive and regular, it is not used to respond effectively to meet the needs of the higher-attaining pupils in lesson planning. The more able pupils in these years are not challenged sufficiently. Too often these pupils finish tasks first and then are occupied with low level tasks rather than being given work designed to extend their skills or understanding. Although there is some evidence of resources being adapted for lower-attaining pupils, their use is not necessarily related to pupils identified as having special educational needs. It is, therefore, not clear how individual education plans can be tackled adequately for these pupils. The use of information and communication technology develops well. Pupils make use of the Internet for research and present relevant data from it. However, where teachers use new technology presentations in class, it sometimes prevents pupils from thinking for themselves, because the presentations provide the answer, denying pupils the opportunity to think for themselves. Good numeracy skills are shown in pupils' work, such as on flood hydrographs and the analysis of beach material. There are good contributions to literacy. For example, pupils have to produce an extended piece of writing on rainforest management in Year 9 which encourages the empathetic writing style.
84. Leadership is good because it is willing to raise achievement by taking on new ideas, especially in adapting to a wider variety of learning styles and making greater use of new technology in the classroom. The leadership has enabled a successful team of teachers to develop who communicate their enthusiasm to the pupils. Management is good because the department is self-evaluative, monitors its performance data well and makes changes where necessary. Policies for planning and assessment are reflected consistently across the department. All members of staff are clear about their roles, responsibilities and personal objectives. Improvement since the last inspection is good mainly because of improved standards at GCSE and improvements in implementing formal assessments.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in history are high, particularly for boys. Results in GCSE are particularly strong in A* and A grades.
- Pupils achieve very well because teachers focus on key historical questions and on developing their abilities to work independently.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons and are prepared to put in a great deal of effort.
- This is a very well led department with a clear focus on what needs doing.
- Some pupils do not listen carefully enough to teachers and to each other and teachers do not always deal with this effectively

Commentary

85. Results in GCSE examinations were significantly above average, especially for A* and A grades, in 2003 and in 2004. Boys did particularly well, out-performing girls in the school by a small percentage and doing significantly better than boys nationally.
86. By Year 9, standards are well above average. Standards in Year 10 and 11 mirror the examination results and are very high. Achievement is very good overall, particularly for boys and for higher-attaining pupils. This is because of consistently high quality teaching that challenges and motivates pupils. Pupils are therefore keen to work hard and do their best.
87. The quality of teaching is very good overall. A particular strength is the focus on historical enquiry. Lessons begin with a key question, such as why did Boudicca fail to beat the Romans, or was Henry VIII a Catholic or a Protestant. This means that right from Year 7 pupils start to think in terms of historical explanation and analysis. Lessons also focus very effectively on supporting pupils to develop independence. Teachers are very enthusiastic about their lessons and, as a result, pupils of all abilities learn very well and show enthusiasm for the topics they study. Although higher-attaining and average pupils are challenged very effectively in all lessons, lower-attaining pupils sometimes need more support and encouragement than they receive. A small percentage of the pupils do not listen carefully enough to teachers and are not always challenged when this happens.
88. Leadership and management are very good and have been instrumental in securing very good improvements in the subject since the last inspection. The head of department has a very clear vision for the department and has very clear strategies to achieve his aims. Teachers work very well together, sharing both good practice and concerns. The day-to-day running of the department is very efficient with clear procedures and expectations.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and targeted revision on the GCSE course are producing outstanding results.
- A coherent system of assessment from Years 7 to 11, modelled on GCSE criteria, promotes high standards.
- The programme of study for Years 7 to 9 does not devote enough time to learning about Islam and Sikhism.
- Pupils are achieving well, enjoying lessons and working hard at the tasks set.
- Learning materials and tasks cater well for most pupils but higher attainers within some classes are not always stretched.
- Good leadership, management and enthusiastic teamwork have succeeded in raising the subject's popularity and academic standing.

Commentary

89. All pupils take the GCSE short course examination in religious education and the results have been consistently well above the national average in recent years. Results in 2004 were higher than in 2003; over half the candidates gained A* and A grades. These results were amongst the best in the school.
90. Standards in Year 11 are well above average. Stimulating teaching combines philosophical ideas with Christian ethics to engage pupils effectively in the study of moral and social issues. Pupils are guided to produce detailed notes that serve as a good basis for revision. Regular practice of GCSE questions and a thorough revision programme ensure that all pupils are well equipped with examination techniques.
91. The foundations for examination success are established in Years 7 to 9, where the system for assessing pupils' progress is based on the GCSE model of testing knowledge, understanding and evaluation. Standards are above average in terms of pupils' ability to understand and evaluate the significance of religious ideas for their own lives. Year 9 pupils studying Buddhism showed a good understanding of the relevance of its universal truths to modern society and were able to appreciate the benefits of meditation through practical experience. Pupils are well informed on Christianity and Buddhism. However, their grasp of basic beliefs and practices in Islam and Sikhism is weaker as these religions are not studied systematically in the depth expected by the local Agreed Syllabus for religious education.
92. Pupils' achievement is good overall and very good at GCSE. Good teaching is producing effective learning at all levels. Pupils display positive attitudes towards the subject, concentrate well in lessons and extend their learning through homework. Teachers base learning on pupils' experience and devise activities that allow them to empathise with believers. Year 7 pupils' role-play of events in the life of St. Martin of Tours was ideal preparation for the school's celebration of the saint's day. Learning materials are well suited to the needs of lower-attaining pupils, enabling them to make good progress. Extension work for higher-attaining pupils, such as further research and extended writing, is not developed to the same extent, making it sometimes difficult to distinguish their work from others.

93. The subject is well led and efficiently managed. There is very good support for non-specialists in terms of well-organised resources and mentoring by specialist teachers. Performance data is monitored carefully and acted upon, turning around disappointing mock examination results last year to produce a record performance at GCSE in summer. This is a good improvement on the previous inspection, when the little time allocated to the subject did not allow pupils to reach expected standards by Year 11. The enthusiasm of the current teaching team has proved creative in developing teaching, learning and resources, with the resultant upward trend in examination results and successful recruitment onto A Level courses.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The strong emphasis on teaching the design process and focused practical tasks develops the skills, knowledge and understanding of pupils effectively.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and make a positive contribution to learning and achievement.
- Target setting and monitoring of pupils' progress is underdeveloped and does not effectively support teachers in meeting the learning needs of all pupils.
- Teachers successfully adopt a comparatively narrow range of teaching strategies; while they meet the learning needs of a majority, they do not consistently meet the learning needs of all pupils.

Commentary

94. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils enter the school with a diverse range of experience in design and technology and standards are below the national average. Standards of attainment are broadly in line with the national average by Years 9 and 11. Throughout Years 7 to 9, work seen indicates developing skills, confidence and competence. In Years 10 and 11, teaching continues to focus on the design process and work seen indicates a degree of sophistication in its use. GCSE results are lower than at the time of the last inspection but are higher than national average results overall. Girls achieve significantly higher results than boys and higher results than girls nationally. The overall gap between boys' and girls' results is wider than the national figure. Standards are above average and achievement is good in food and textiles. Individual support for pupils is good, including pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language.
95. Teaching overall is satisfactory, with examples of good and very good features. Teachers' good subject knowledge, behaviour management and workshop organisation supports learning effectively. In good lessons, teachers challenge pupils intellectually and creatively. This ensures that pupils understand what they are learning and they progress well. Teachers' understanding and match of teaching styles and strategies to meet the needs of all pupils is currently underdeveloped across the faculty; this impedes the pupils' progress and achievement. The teaching

of information and communication technology, literacy and numeracy is satisfactory overall, but not well focused or detailed in planning. There is much good evidence in work seen that information and communication technology skills are well developed which enables pupils to use new technology as a tool to support their learning and to enhance the presentation of their work. Pupils' learning is satisfactory overall; they enjoy lessons and take an active interest in completing their work. The highest attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 complete additional work of their own accord, adding breadth and depth to well present design folders.

96. Leadership and management are both satisfactory. The head of faculty is committed to continuous improvement in design and technology; key post holders share and model the faculty goals. The food and textiles department is effectively led, which results in secure teaching and learning and good standards and achievement. Challenges posed by high staff turnover have been met and the faculty is well placed to raise standards further. Whilst much of the quality provision has been maintained, management does not focus sufficiently on improving teaching and learning. Improvement planning, monitoring and evaluation do not currently include sufficient focus on identifying and sharing most effective practice. Similarly, data analysis is not used to focus teaching methods and resources to meet the learning needs of all pupils.
97. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The design process is now well embedded into the curriculum and ensures an effective and unified approach to teaching and learning. There is a greater variety and appropriate range of project work across all material areas. The faculty is now well placed to improve further.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Progress in Years 7 to 9 is good.
- The pupils use a good range of resources in their artwork.
- The use of sketchbooks is developed well and three-dimensional work is of a good quality throughout the school.
- Information and communication technology development is weak in Years 7 to 9, although this improves in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

98. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in Years 7 to 9, although this tails off amongst boys towards the end of Year 9. However, overall standards are above average by the end of Year 9. Sketchbooks are used well in Years 7 to 9 and the work in them is varied. The department has improved and consolidated three-dimensional work. Painting and drawing is satisfactory and both three-dimensional and collage work is good. The most able pupils improve by two National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9, although there is no identification of talented pupils or special

work provided for them. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and standards at the end of Year 11 are above average overall. GCSE results have fluctuated, but through changes to the course organisation, standards have improved over recent years and are now at national averages. However, girls outperform boys because their sketchbooks are more imaginative, more meticulous and better presented. The range of all pupils work is often good. The best pupils produce some excellent examples of painting and drawing and very good examples of mixed media and three-dimensional work. Pupils with special educational needs are given careful support by their teachers and they make satisfactory progress through the school.

99. Since the last inspection the department has improved the use of new technology, but does not have enough equipment to use or the right programs for all pupils. Work using new technology is limited in Years 7 to 9 to Internet research and word-processing as there are no drawing programs for use by pupils. By contrast, most pupils use information and communication technology well in Years 10 and 11 to create and manipulate images and also use photography well as a development and recording tool. Literacy is well developed through the pupils' writing about art and through discussion. The recent focus on writing about their work is improving standards of current Year 10 and 11 pupils. There is limited focus on mathematical development, although the pupils' skills are such that access to the curriculum is assured.
100. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and sometimes good. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to plan thoroughly. They encourage pupils very well and feedback through discussion and individual support is good. Teaching is sharply focused with little loss of time. Pupils' targets are clear and they know what to do to improve. Pupils are taught to self-assess their work and the work of others. This leads to higher standards and to good assessment. Behaviour is usually good and pupils have a very positive attitude to their learning. They seldom misbehave because of the variety of the work and the support and interest of their teachers. Homework is often done well. The assessment of pupils' work is good but the Year 9 teacher assessment judgements are not moderated and not always accurate.
101. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory overall. The vision for the department is clear and is shared by everyone. There is a good sense of purpose and teachers have high expectations. The art department work as an effective team, but development plans are relatively weak with few targets and no costs. The head of department is innovative and good at motivating others. The line management of the creative arts faculty has some weaknesses. There are no time-tabled meetings between the head of faculty and the head of art leading to a limited review of GCSE examination results and a limited improvement plan. The problems of the expansion of the work of the department has been discussed but not tackled in any detail.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Years 10 and 11 and pupils achieve well at this stage.
- There is some good teaching, although it does not always challenge pupils to achieve higher standards.
- Pupils benefit from the use of new technology.
- Pupils enjoy concerts and productions in the school.

Commentary

102. Pupils achieve satisfactorily by the end of Year 9. Their standards are average. This judgement does not accord with the teacher's assessments for 2004 which are judged too highly. However, more pupils achieve an average level than is seen nationally. Pupils' recent performances heard on tape tend to lack fluency and polish. Compositions show that pupils understand a variety of techniques in variation form but find translating these into a sequence making musical sense more difficult. When pupils are challenged to think and perform musically this results in good fluent performances as in a Year 7 lesson on medieval music.
103. Standards in Year 11 are above average thanks to good progress in instrumental performance developed through good teaching. Achievement is good. Recent recorded compositions show that most pupils are grasping the essential features of this and have the benefit of using new technology to help them. The GCSE results in 2004 were well above average. All pupils passed and 10 achieved a grade A. Boys achieved higher grades than girls in this year. The results were a considerable improvement on 2003 when they were below average.
104. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The pupils' ability to make progress is in direct relationship to the quality of teaching. Where teaching is good, pupils learn well and make good progress in the lesson. Such lessons are well planned and move at a good pace. Tasks are challenging for the majority, although some of the more able pupils easily achieve the class task and need to be challenged further. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a good attitude to the subject. They enjoy their work and behave well because they are interested. Behaviour is well managed. Pupils are encouraged to make decisions about how performances proceed and practise on their own without the support of the teacher. Teachers know their subject well and are well organised with a variety of good resources. In some lessons the teacher confidently used new technology to present information to the class. Most lessons are satisfactory, but have shortcomings where good relationships have not been established. The result is that the pupils' behaviour is not well managed. Furthermore, pupils are not sufficiently engaged, group work is inconsistent with many pupils coasting through unchallenging tasks.
105. The new system of assessment is promising, although there has been insufficient time for this to prove beneficial. Pupils know their current level but have little idea what this means and what it tells them about how to improve. Years 10 and 11 have just begun to assess themselves and each other using the examination marking scheme. It was not obvious in the lesson that pupils had understood fully how they could apply the criteria to their own performances.
106. The leadership and management of the department are new. There is insufficient evidence to make a secure judgement, but a satisfactory start has been made. Two

new teachers have joined the team this term. Much hard work has gone into establishing the new assessment procedure. Standards have been maintained since the previous inspection and improvement is satisfactory overall. There is considerable enthusiasm for music in the school. Bands and groups enjoy performing at concerts and the department makes a considerable contribution to the school's annual musical production.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very sharply focused on securing further improvements in the pupils' achievement.
- Standards at GCSE are high and pupils achieve very well.
- Pupils respond extremely positively to the high quality of much of the teaching and the very wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities.
- Insufficient time is allocated to core lessons in Years 10 and 11.
- The boys changing area and office space are small and poorly decorated.

Commentary

107. GCSE results in 2004 were very high and continued an annual rising trend. A little over half the pupils attained A* and A grades. Pupils performed very well and better than in other subjects. Present GCSE pupils produce very good quality written work and have high levels of practical expertise. The very good teaching in GCSE lessons combined with pupils' real enjoyment of the subject contributes significantly to the pupils' very good progress.
108. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is wide ranging, but is mostly in line with national expectations. In Year 9, pupils attain above average standards in most activities and their achievement is good. The strength lies in the development of good performance skills especially in games activities. Girls and boys build a secure knowledge of health and fitness and are able to warm up effectively. Pupils gain this knowledge in their fitness lessons and through teachers' insistence on thorough warm up activities at the start of every lesson. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 attain above average standards in core lessons because they continue to improve their games and movement skills and their achievement in the one lesson allocated each week is good. As part of the excellent extra-curricular programme, many individual pupils and teams achieve very high standards in district, county and national competitions in netball, cricket, rugby, football, athletics, tennis, badminton, basketball and hockey. These talented pupils benefit greatly from the excellent opportunities their teachers provide.
109. The overall very good teaching reflects teachers' high expectations and their ability to give precise demonstrations which pupils can model. Members of staff teach lessons in a lively way which motivates pupils and often involves them in leading groups and working co-operatively. There is usually a good balance between practice

opportunities and application of skills in a competitive situation. In a few lessons in Years 7 and 8, insufficient opportunities are given for pupils to develop their evaluative skills. Pupils are taught in single gender and ability groups in Years 7 to 9. This combined with the help teachers give to individuals assist pupils of different standards to make the same good progress.

110. The leadership and management of the department are excellent and have been instrumental in securing the excellent improvement in provision since the last inspection. Members of the department form a strong team with a shared desire to raise standards. Much emphasis has been placed on the successful development of resources for the GCSE course. Currently, schemes of work for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are not detailed enough and are not linked to risk assessments. Pupils are assessed accurately and informed about their performance. Pupils have very good understanding of how to improve their level of work. The new changing facilities for girls, combined with the sports hall, gymnasias, fields and court areas provide very good facilities and are a very positive factor in promoting high standards of performance. However, the boys' changing areas and office are in urgent need of refurbishment. There is only one mini bus in the school. This limits some activities as does the absence of a technician or resource manager.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

111. No subject was inspected in depth, but business studies, and health and social care, were sampled in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results in **business studies** were below average in 2004. However, a wide range of competence was in evidence in the lesson observed and standards overall were average. Teaching was satisfactory. Pupils had the opportunity to work in groups to research and present conclusions on the business, environmental and sociological aspects of a selected business organisation. The best groups had prepared thoroughly and were able to justify their assertions using appropriate evidence and demonstrating a good understanding of the issues. Weaker groups often simply listed a number of relevant points with no justification or analysis. One enterprising group sang their response in the style of an advertisement for the chosen company. The lesson was reviewed and salient points were appropriately highlighted by the teacher, although this review lost some of its impact because of inattention towards the end of the lesson.
112. The two lessons of **health and social care** were both well taught, although standards were below average. Both lessons were well planned and activities divided into short and manageable parts. Achievement benefited considerably from the pupils' response to the teachers' high expectations of work and behaviour.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

113. Pupils study personal and social education in rotation with citizenship and careers under the title of 'civics'. Citizenship was inspected as a discrete subject and some lessons observed in **personal, social and health education**. This subject is taught well by a dedicated team of teachers drawn from across the school. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers are well prepared, knowledgeable in their own areas and create a very good atmosphere. This is particularly so in lessons where

there is the risk of embarrassment. Topics are dealt with sensitively and pupils respond by behaving maturely.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Year 11 and pupils have achieved well at all levels since the subject was introduced.
- The teaching is good overall and very good in Year 11.
- Pupils hold firm opinions and are anxious to express these in lessons.
- The assessment procedure so far does not give pupils information on how to improve.
- There are good opportunities for all pupils to take part in activities.

Commentary

114. During the inspection it was impossible to observe Year 9 as their citizenship provision is through special days when specific topics are the centre of focus. However, standards in Year 8 are average. Pupils are achieving well. They are developing a good understanding of the family as a unit. They show a good understanding of the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen of the European Union. They have built well on their understanding of being part of a community studied in Year 7. Standards in Year 11 are above average and the pupils are achieving well in Years 10 and 11. They study crime and punishment. They show good understanding of arguments for and against capital punishment and of the implications of each point of view.
115. Lessons are well planned and teachers know their subject well. They question pupils skilfully to check their knowledge and understanding. The best lessons are stimulating and enjoyable. Debates and discussions are challenging. Pupils hold firm opinions which most are anxious to express articulately. Pupils are lively and interested in lessons. Relationships with each other and their teachers are good and they collaborate well when required in lessons. They listen to each other with respect. Teachers steer and guide discussions with considerable skill in order to help pupils reflect, empathise and think more clearly about the issues. Different strategies for helping pupils to learn effectively are used, such as a formal debate about capital punishment in Year 11 or a day on defence led by the army for Year 9 pupils. There are good opportunities for individual work such as research and for communicating this information to others. Year 8 pupils researched the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen of the European Union. They assembled this information and presented it to their peers. There are good opportunities for all pupils to participate in activities such as the charity days which are organised by the pupils.
116. Other subjects, particularly English, physical education, information and communication technology, geography, history, drama and religious education have identified aspects of their curriculum where citizenship can be taught. During the inspection there were no instances of this being acknowledged in lessons even though

subject matter was appropriate. Opportunities to maximise the breadth of this subject are therefore not being taken.

117. The subject is very well led. It is highly organised and taught by a team of skilled teachers. The management of the department is good. The strategy for assessing pupils' work is not sufficiently developed to be totally effective in telling pupils about their strengths and about how they may improve their weaknesses. However, this is part of a long term and very pertinent development plan which is monitored closely. The citizenship leader and teachers are anxious for continuous improvement.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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
Area Studies	13	84.6	n/a	46.2	n/a	36.2	n/a
Art and design	3	100.00	80.1	0.0	23.7	33.3	29.9
Biology	10	70	65.2	10.0	11.1	20.0	20.6
Business studies	2	100.0	76.4	0.0	16.3	25.0	26.2
Chemistry	3	66.7	72.7	0.0	13.9	13.3	24.1
Communication studies	2	100.0	86.4	0.0	23.8	25.0	32.0
Drama	3	100.0	86.5	33.3	19.6	36.7	30.6
Economics	8	87.5	73.6	25.0	20.1	32.5	26.4
English language	13	100.0	82.9	38.5	17.5	40.0	28.7
English literature	8	100.0	85.9	12.5	19.1	35.0	30.2
French	4	100.0	78.2	0.0	18.9	32.5	27.6
Design and technology	6	33.3	74.9	0.0	15.1	6.7	25.3
GeneralsStudies	28	96.4	73.9	17.9	17.8	33.9	25.7
Geography	9	100.0	74.3	11.1	19.8	36.7	26.5
History	4	75.0	80.7	25.0	19.5	30.0	28.6
Information technology	9	100.0	67.0	33.3	10.9	40.0	21.4
Mathematics	33	42.4	61.9	0.0	17.1	11.8	22.1
Music	2	100.0	86.5	50.0	21.4	50.0	30.7
Physics	12	75.0	68.6	8.3	14.4	20.8	22.7
Religious studies	6	66.7	80.2	0.0	22.6	20.0	29.8
Sociology	5	100.0	71.8	40.0	18.4	38.0	25.4
Sports studies	1	100.0	73.2	100.0	11.4	50.0	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 and design	11	100.0	98.6	54.5	50.2	90.9	87.5
Art and design VQ	3	66.7	69.3	0.0	23.8	53.3	70.2
Biology	19	94.7	96.4	21.1	39.2	65.3	78.6
Business studies	10	100.0	98.7	40.0	36.8	86.0	80.1
Business VCE	14	85.7	65.0	21.4	14.6	58.6	60.1
Chemistry	8	100.0	97.6	12.5	49.0	57.5	84.9
Drama	18	100.0	99.5	44.4	40.1	85.6	83.6

Economics	10	100.0	98.9	40.0	52.0	92.0	88.3
English literature	50	100.0	99.5	52.0	46.5	87.6	86.5
French	3	100.0	98.8	100.0	51.5	120.0	87.6
Design and technology	5	100.0	97.8	20.0	35.0	72.0	77.9
General studies	111	97.3	94.7	30.6	31.0	77.1	73.1
Geography	20	100.0	98.7	65.0	44.5	91.0	84.0
German	3	100.0	98.4	66.7	47.9	100.0	84.8
History	29	100.0	99.0	48.3	44.6	85.5	84.6
Information technology	21	100.0	95.6	23.8	24.6	70.5	69.5
Information technology VQ	11	100.0	77.9	36.4	23.4	83.6	64.9
Mathematics	19	73.7	96.7	31.6	55.6	62.1	88.8
Music	2	100.0	98.8	0.0	38.9	80.0	81.1
Physics	14	100.0	96.7	42.9	44.6	85.7	81.7
Religious studies	18	100.0	98.8	66.7	46.7	97.8	85.6
Sociology	15	100.0	98.2	13.3	44.3	69.3	83.6
Sports studies	16	100.0	98.0	37.5	30.9	83.8	75.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in AS and A Level examinations dropped below the national average in 2004; these students underachieved in relation to their standards in GCSE.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and students appreciate their care and interest.
- Despite some good lessons, teaching overall is satisfactory; styles of teaching are not always adapted for sixth form work and there is too little independent learning.
- English language is now offered at A Level in addition to English literature.
- The head of faculty analyses performance data and has some practical strategies for improvement.

Commentary

118. English literature is one of the most popular subjects at AS and A Level and until 2004 regularly attracted the largest number of candidates. More girls than boys choose the subject but there are no significant differences in their performance. English language has been previously offered only at AS Level but currently the first group of students is continuing in Year 13 and will take the examination at A Level.

119. A Level results in 2004 dropped below those attained in the two previous years largely because the number of students attaining either A or B grades was well below the national average. The results should have been higher given these students' previous

attainment in English. In the AS examinations taken at the end of Year 12, results were also disappointing, showing insufficient progress from the high grades attained in GCSE English in the previous year.

120. Work seen during the inspection showed that most students concentrate well on close study of the texts and produce full folders of notes and essays. They come into the sixth form with good standards of writing developed in their GCSE work and they understand how to analyse and comment on a literature text. These are good starting points for A Level work, as are their interest and regular attendance, but the style of the teaching and learning in lessons is not always appropriate for work at this stage. Consequently, in their reading, talking and writing, standards are average and they do not progress to sufficiently high levels.
121. In all but one literature lesson the teacher led throughout, asking questions of students whose answers were always directed back to teacher. Students benefit from teachers' considerable knowledge and appreciation of the literature texts, but they are too ready to remain passive rather than independent and active learners. Apart from some paired work, students seldom talk to and learn from others in the group. They do not lead presentations or bring well-prepared material as a starting point for the shared exploration of text, character or theme in the books they are studying. Lively discussion and the cut and thrust of argument were missing from most of these lessons. In one teacher's view, they are given so much help with GCSE that they find it difficult to adjust to working more independently in the sixth form. However, there are indications that when more is demanded of them they enjoy the seminar style of teaching which requires them to be more actively involved in the lessons.
122. The best literature lesson seen, in Year 13, was a good example of this. Students were given a poem by Emily Bronte to consider in relation to *Wuthering Heights*, one of their texts. Work in pairs led to a discussion by the whole group in which students, seated in a circle, put points to one another in a shared and searching investigation of the poem. There was agreement and disagreement as comments were made, and some sustained contributions from students thinking things through as they spoke. The teacher guided with a firm but light touch, very much in the role of chair. The discussion developed well and led to some valuable insights and pointers to further work. Good work was also seen in a Year 12 English language class, when students were asked to speculate on the context and source of a promotional piece of writing. They talked readily, enjoying using some new linguistic terms, with a lively sense of exploration and enquiry. This lesson took place in a sixth form classroom, where setting and seating contributed to a sense of moving on from GCSE work.
123. Talking about their work, Year 13 students said that they enjoyed the course and appreciated their teachers. Their more critical comments should be useful to the department in evaluating and planning its work and they echo the findings of the inspection. The library does not provide good support for A Level English studies and they seldom use it for this purpose. They were disappointed that in their first year in the sixth form, no theatre trips or excursions had been arranged and here newcomers pointed out the contrast with experiences at their previous schools. The lack of general extra-curricular activities in English was also mentioned and has been noted in the main school English report.

124. The head of faculty provides satisfactory leadership and good management of the sixth form team. However, in the sixth form as in the main school, the department is missing opportunities to extend and enrich students' experience. It is well placed now to consider what might be done to ensure the success of any new project by good planning and good staff support.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

125. Selective entry to AS and A Level courses ensures that students enter the sixth form with standards of literacy at least adequate for the courses they undertake. Large numbers of students study A Level English where their writing skills develop steadily with practice and evaluation. The excellent work seen earlier in physical education continues in the sixth form, where students in Year 13 grade skills and give feedback to meet A Level examination criteria. Some very good written work is produced in A Level design and technology. In history, teachers work very hard to enable students to write analytically and to develop their higher-order writing skills. In business studies, good literacy skills enable students to access a very wide range of resources and in some cases to correspond with business organisations. However, students' writing standards are no more than satisfactory in psychology, where achievement is lower than might be expected.

126. In some subjects students are not using their reading, writing and speaking and research skills fully in the independent learning which should be central to their sixth form studies. Confident and creative oral work is evident in theatre studies, but in some other subjects, including English, there is not enough good discussion, performance or presentation. Where this is encouraged, students show that they can enjoy it and do well.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have excellent command of the language and insist that students speak it at every opportunity.
- Students respond very well to the high level of challenge and expectation.
- Courses are well planned and structured to maximise students' command and enjoyment of the language but they sometimes lack confidence in oral work.

Commentary

127. Standards in French in both AS and A Level examinations and those seen during the inspection are very high. A very high proportion of students have gained A or B grades at both AS and A Level. This has been the general trend over several years even though the numbers opting for the higher level studies has been variable. Achievement is of an equal quality. Students are very well taught and they respond with enthusiasm and commitment, which is reflected in the high percentage of them choosing to continue to study the language in their higher education courses.

128. This very good teaching is typified by teachers' excellent command and use of the language in class and an insistence that learners also use the language to its full extent. Expectations are very high and students are constantly and continually challenged to produce work of an extremely high quality which stimulates and develops them academically as well as linguistically. Teachers provide stimulus materials which genuinely interest learners and promote a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction at the progress made. Lessons are very well structured in order to build on prior learning and move students on to higher levels of language development. Occasionally, lessons involve too much input from the teacher and not enough from the students, particularly when students are less confident in their own language skills, but teachers employ very good strategies to develop their self expression.
129. Very good leadership and management of the course ensures that shared classes are well planned and that teachers' own strengths are put to their best use for the students' benefit. Courses are very well structured and move learning along to a very high level of competence. Improvement since the last inspection has been good; the proportion of very high grades has been improved and the option has remained relatively popular.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results do not reflect or build on successfully from the high performance at GCSE.
- Teachers are confident with their subject knowledge, although teaching is very focused on the needs of the examinations.
- Good relationships create a good ethos for learning.

Commentary

130. A Level results improved in 2004. While the percentage of students who attained A to E grades matched the national average, the overall results and the percentage attaining the higher A and B grades were well below average. This represented barely satisfactory progress for these students given their attainment at the start of the course. Improvements in the AS Level results for 2004 indicate that standards are rising. However, achievement is only satisfactory.
131. Standards are average in the current Years 12 and 13. Books contain good quantities of examples, well marked, with helpful comments for improvement. Assessment in class is good. Teachers make themselves aware of students' difficulties; the students and their teacher work together effectively to overcome them. Progress is monitored through regular assessments. This helps to ensure that learning is satisfactory. However, target-setting is not used effectively as a tool for challenging students as targets are not sufficiently high for students with such good GCSE results. Students' good attitudes result in them working hard to complete the tasks set. Good use is made of study outside the lessons.

132. Teachers have a good command of the subject, which engenders confidence in the students. Relationships in class are good and create a secure ethos for learning. Teaching is satisfactory. Lessons are well planned to provide appropriate challenge and satisfactory pace. However, teaching styles are narrowly focused on the requirements of the examinations. In the teaching seen and from evidence in students' books, there is a reliance placed on the use of standard formulae and approaches which, while being satisfactory to pass the examination do not generate the thorough understanding of the underlying principles necessary to attain the highest grades. The use of new technology as an aid to teaching and learning is also limited.
133. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as is the improvement since the last inspection. Leadership of the subject is focused on raising standards. There is recognition that students should be obtaining higher examination grades and teachers share a common aim of raising the attainment of their students. Teaching is monitored regularly as is the work of the students. Student numbers are increasing and good numbers take further mathematics. However, there is a reluctance to raise the profile of mathematics as a subject for study in the sixth form. One result of this is the small number of high attaining girls opting for the subject for sixth form study.

Mathematics across the curriculum

134. The mathematical competence of the students is above average for sixth forms. They cope well with the statistical element of subjects, modern foreign languages and geography for example and their ability to analyse data for business studies is good. Science subjects find their above average ability aids progress. Although no work is done to develop mathematical skills across the sixth form, problems with those skills impacting negatively on student progress are not an issue.

SCIENCE

Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The proportion of higher grades gained in A Level examinations is below average due in part to teaching methods that do not sufficiently stretch high attaining students.
- Achievement is satisfactory because the students have positive attitudes to their work and respond well to satisfactory teaching.
- Teachers have good relationships with students; they manage their classes well and they are focused on raising standards. As a result, the subject is popular and students enjoy it.
- Teachers have insufficient access to good quality computer equipment that would enhance the presentation of their lessons.

Commentary

135. Results in the 2004 A Level examinations were well below average, due in part to the low proportion of students gaining the highest grades. These results were lower than in 2003. However, the overall results were consistent with the students' performance at GCSE level. AS Level results improved in 2004 and were in line with the national average. Standards seen on the inspection are average, with students, including those with special educational needs, achieving satisfactorily and making the progress that would be expected on the basis of their past results.
136. Achievement and learning are satisfactory because the students' positive attitudes to work and their good relationships with teachers ensure that they respond well to satisfactory teaching. The teachers' very good subject knowledge and good class management ensure that there is no unsatisfactory teaching, although some of the teaching methods do not place enough emphasis on encouraging students to use their knowledge and understanding of the subject to discuss and explain their work. This most often occurs where teachers are unfamiliar with the syllabus and the links between topics, resulting in some missed opportunities to stretch the highest attaining students. This is partly responsible for the below average results in A Level examinations.
137. Nevertheless, some good and very good teaching was seen where students were encouraged to take part in discussions and to use their knowledge to predict and explain experimental findings. This was evident in a Year 12 lesson on factors affecting enzyme activity, where students reached above average standards in carrying out practical work and using their knowledge to explain and predict the shapes of graphs. Other practical work is carried out well and students have sufficient skills in English and mathematics to enable them to cope with work at this level. Their information and communication technology skills are also good but they do not have enough opportunities to use data-logging equipment. Teaching is sometimes less effective than it might be because teachers have limited access to suitable computer equipment to enhance and enliven the presentation of lessons.
138. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory and there is a clear focus on improving standards. Good support is being given to less experienced teachers, enhanced by the introduction of new schemes of work. Some monitoring of teaching and learning takes place, but this is an area that could be improved in order to ensure enough challenge for high attaining students. Students are very positive about the teaching and support they receive. Assessment and record keeping procedures are good, allowing students and teachers to have a clear understanding of progress, so that targets for improvement can be set. This, together with staffing changes and the new schemes of work, is beginning to have an impact on standards so that improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students enjoy the subject, work hard and respond well to the teaching, so that their achievement in the subject is satisfactory.

- Standards are improving but the proportion of higher grades at A Level is below average due in part to teaching methods that do not always provide enough challenge for high attaining students.
- Teachers have good relationships with students and are committed to raising standards in the subject.
- Teachers have limited access to suitable computer equipment and this restricts the range and effectiveness of teaching in some lessons.

Commentary

139. Results improved in the 2004 A Level examinations but were still below average and below the levels expected on the basis of the students' GCSE results. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades was below average. There was a substantial improvement in the highest grades at AS Level in 2004. This was reflected in standards seen on the inspection which are average in Years 12 and 13. Achievement in both years is satisfactory. Students, including those with special educational needs make progress at a satisfactory rate. Standards seen in organic chemistry are higher than in inorganic and physical chemistry.
140. Satisfactory learning and achievement result from the students' positive response to satisfactory teaching. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection and some teaching was very good, as for example in a Year 13 lesson where the teacher used his very good subject knowledge to deliver a challenging lesson on the synthesis of benzene derivatives. Students participated keenly in discussion of the work, achieving very well and showing above average understanding of the reactions involved. However, some teaching misses opportunities to stretch high attaining students by involving them in discussion that requires them to explain and predict using their knowledge of chemistry. This is most apparent where teachers have less experience of the syllabus, despite their good subject knowledge. Limited access to suitable computer equipment to enhance the presentation of lessons restricts the range and effectiveness of some teaching. Practical work is undertaken regularly and is carried out well as a result of effective class management and students' positive attitudes. Students have sufficient skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology to enable them to cope with work at this level but they do not have enough opportunities to use data-logging equipment. The teachers' commitment to raising standards in the subject and the good relationships they have with students ensure that the students are well motivated and enjoy the subject.
141. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A focused action plan for raising standards has been produced and recent changes are beginning to have an effect. There is good teamwork between those teaching the subject. Less experienced teachers receive good support, but monitoring of teaching and learning is not robust enough to have had an impact on the range of teaching methods used. Assessment and recording of students' progress are effective and results are used to set targets for further improvement. Students are very positive about the teaching and support they receive in the subject. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory, with changes in the staffing and organisation of the subject are beginning to have a beneficial effect on standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All teaching is secure; some is good or very good.
- Standards are above the national average and students achieve at appropriate levels.
- There is some innovative use of new technology.
- There are effective systems in place, such as for the production of coursework.

Commentary

142. Results in the 2004 A Level examinations were above those nationally, including a higher proportion of A and B grades. This represents secure progress for the students from their earlier results at GCSE. The proportion of higher grades improved on those of 2003, when students performed as well in information and communication technology as they did in their other subjects. Current students are also achieving at appropriate levels. The systems and frameworks for supporting them through the coursework units are effective and students have a good overview of key ideas.
143. Achievement is secure because all teaching is at least satisfactory and students are positive and well motivated. They work together supportively, get on with tasks with maturity and generally accept responsibility for their own progress; consequently they learn. Individual students consistently receive good support from their teachers who have high levels of expertise, in both the ideas and software being developed and in examination requirements. This means that guidance is focused and accurate and problems get solved. In the best lessons, teachers monitor student progress, check their understanding and intervene, as well as responding to problems that arise. In satisfactory lessons, there are not always sufficient interactions to involve and engage students fully. Teachers do not consistently highlight the most effective practice for students, or encourage widespread self- and peer-evaluation.
144. There is very effective use of technology in some lessons. For example, it is used to monitor understanding through standard tests and to cement learning through repeating them. The progress of task completion is monitored by the online submission of work to fixed deadlines with corresponding feedback. Furthermore, working with and learning from others is encouraged through discussion forums. This innovative use of technology is encouraging and enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning as well as developing an effective framework for supporting good progress.
145. Some of the good systems established within the teaching team are not used consistently by all, but day-to-day operations are managed well. Coursework routines are well established and well regarded by external agencies. Student progress is monitored and evaluated, but targets on which they are based are less secure. There is a clear understanding of the methods and strategies that will best meet the needs of students and a clear vision for future course development and provision. There has been satisfactory progress since the previous inspection, with good management and secure leadership.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

146. Sixth form students have the necessary skills to use new technology routinely, for research and for presenting their work, for example. They have good access to resources, including a computer suite and library-based machines in the sixth form area. They use the Internet, mainly using the information gathered well and being selective as to the value they place on it. Some evaluate different sources sensibly and combine information to extend their understanding or knowledge base. They know which software to use for different purposes. Many have computers at home and use this interchangeably with the equipment at school.

HUMANITIES

147. Geography, history and psychology were inspected in depth and lessons were seen in government and politics, sociology and religious education. One lesson of **sociology** in Year 13 was observed. The teaching was excellent and provided students with very high levels of challenge and excellent opportunities to work independently. Because of this they were able to achieve high standards and showed a clear commitment to their learning. A particularly strong feature of the teaching was the way in which the teacher ensured that lesson content was relevant and up-to-date. For example, the students looked at the Labour Party's removal of Clause Four as an example of post-modernist politics.

148. Results in **religious education** at A Level were well above average in 2002 and 2003. The 2004 results were about average. Current Year 13 students gained above average results at AS Level and are maintaining this standard of work at A Level. They are achieving well. In the two lessons observed effective teaching consolidated students' knowledge and understanding of the philosophers they have been studying. Students are enjoying the courses and lesson activities. They feel confident about their studies, benefiting from accurate assessment of their work and personal guidance to assist their progress.

149. In the one lesson of **politics** that was observed in Year 12, standards were average. Teaching about the role and power of the Prime Minister was satisfactory. The teacher was knowledgeable and added key points to the students' views.

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students develop a good knowledge and understanding of the subject which results in examination success.
- A minority of students do not achieve as well as they might.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology for research.

Commentary

150. Achievement is satisfactory as is the quality of teaching and learning. Results at A Level were above national averages in 2003. They fell in 2004 to be in line with national averages. Female students performed much better than their male counterparts at the higher grades. Standards are currently above average in Years 12 and 13. Students can explain complex interactions and refer to a wide range of factors to explain and predict change for example, in the changing characteristics of city structure.
151. Good teaching is characterised by students being involved in their learning. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and good understanding of the steps that students need to take in their learning by, for example, explaining how to structure written answers. However, the emphasis all too often remains with the teacher who often accepts answers only from the most responsive rather than nominating others to answer. Discussions are sometimes dominated by the teacher and the higher-attaining students at the expense of the involvement of others. When able to discuss amongst themselves, girls in particular begin to respond better.
152. Information and communication technology is used very well for research, as in a Year 13 lesson on global warming. This is achieved through the school's intranet which enables information to be shared and makes efficient use of research time. Assessment is good because it is thorough and constructive. Marking helps students to improve their work. Through effective monitoring, students have a good understanding of their target grades and what steps they need to take to improve. The attitudes of students are very good. They enjoy the subject when there is variety built into the approach to their learning and they appreciate it when they have opportunities to research and discuss. They find some of the work very challenging but Year 13 students are enjoying their work more than in Year 12. They particularly enjoy their fieldwork opportunities. They find that teachers support them well and are available if they are in difficulty. A good indication of very positive attitudes is that almost all of the Year 12 students want to go on to complete A Level.
153. Leadership is good because it is willing to raise achievement by being open to new ideas, for example, by making greater use of new technology. There is successful teamwork among the subject specialists who communicate their knowledge and enthusiasm to the students. Management is good because the department is self-evaluative; it monitors performance data well and makes changes where necessary. Policies for planning and assessment are reflected consistently across the department. All members of staff are clear about their roles, responsibilities and personal objectives. Improvement since the previous inspection is good because although there is an element of lack of challenge for some students, standards at A Level are much higher than they were at the highest grades and the subject is a much more popular option.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a wealth of subject knowledge in the department and an enthusiasm for imparting it through a variety of teaching styles.
- Students' enjoyment of history reflects their teachers' enthusiasm for the subject and lessons are entertaining as well as instructive.
- Students exceed their minimum target grades and improve significantly between Year 12 and Year 13.
- Effective leadership is moving the subject forward by focusing on students' preferred styles of learning.
- The courses are well supported by reference books and collected articles that provide a rich bank of resources for private study in the sixth form library.

Commentary

154. History is a popular choice for study in the sixth form, with over thirty students taking A Level examinations in each year. The 2004 A Level results were in line with the national average, but with a below average proportion of students attaining A and B grades. Overall, students exceeded the minimum target grades set by the school by half a grade on average and improved on their AS results from Year 12. They did not achieve the potential proportion of top grades indicated by their GCSE results.
155. The six teachers provide their students with a wealth of expert knowledge and A Level expertise, setting them high standards. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned to engage students in learning through a variety of approaches, which included student presentations on the work of Woodrow Wilson and a mock trial of Ramsey MacDonald during the inspection week. There has been a concerted effort to adapt some of the teaching strategies that have proved so effective in main school to enliven learning in the sixth form. Starter quizzes had this effect in two lessons observed, making the learning entertaining. In some lessons, learning is more passive, making less demand on the student to contribute to group learning. Where there was closer monitoring of students' files and more frequent testing of understanding, the progress was more marked.
156. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are above average and students are achieving well, working to the potential they showed at GCSE. There is considerable enthusiasm for American history on the AS Level course and students are using their initiative well to research topics and present their findings. Their examination technique is benefiting from practice at timed essays and from using A Level marking schemes to assess each other's work. The current Year 13 students did well when at AS Level and are maintaining these standards through to A Level. They are receiving extra training in planning and writing essays at this level, extending their reading and making appropriate references to scholarship in their work. The diagnostic feedback they receive from teachers is coaching them well.
157. Effective leadership and management, supported by the commitment of the teaching team, are moving the subject forward in the sixth form with new approaches to teaching and learning, designed to follow through on the high level of success achieved at GCSE. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. New methods have increased the level of interaction between teachers and the students in lessons since the previous inspection. In particular, the resources for private study in the sixth form have been improved, to include reference books, collections of articles and subscription to a history website. Performance data in the subject is carefully

analysed against national data but also needs to take account of the relative performance of students in their other subjects.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- AS Level results improved in 2004; however, male students are not achieving as well as they should.
- Teachers use their specialist knowledge to plan their lessons carefully, although structures are not in place to bridge the gap between the level of work at GCSE and A Level.
- There are good relationships between staff and students.
- Assessment is not sufficiently accurate to support the development of a range of approaches for the teaching of students with differing knowledge and skill levels.

Commentary

158. Psychology was introduced into the sixth form as a taught subject in September 2002. Since then the subject has grown rapidly with the numbers in Year 13 doubling to 69 this year. The achievement of students in both Year 12 and Year 13 is satisfactory. However, the results at A Level in 2004 were well below average. The AS results in 2004 showed improvement, so that they were broadly in line with national averages. Standards overall in Years 12 and 13 are in line with the national average. Male students' attainment is lower than that of female students, particularly in terms of A and B grades at A Level in 2004 and currently in Years 12 and 13.
159. Psychology is a completely new subject for all students coming into Year 12 and they have to learn a range of study skills. They find this challenging. Many Year 12 students are finding that there is a considerable change in the approach to learning expected in the sixth form from that adopted for GCSE courses. They would benefit from more explicit teaching in the steps to becoming an enquiring and independent learner. Much of the work seen is focused on the comparison of research findings. Recording is done in a variety of forms. However, students do not readily think about how to link together the concepts they have learned about. Instead they rely on the teacher to point this out to them. Students in both Year 12 and Year 13 are able to state their opinion to their peers, but they are much more reluctant to disagree and to justify their position. The opportunity to learn through debate is largely missed.
160. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The subject is taught by well qualified and knowledgeable teachers. In the best examples seen, careful lesson planning and good quality stimulus materials led to activities which provided challenge. However, in one lesson the challenge was too high for many students so that they were reluctant to start the work. The students' work shows evidence of understanding the ethical considerations in experimentation and a grasp of cultural bias. Students use specialist vocabulary well in their writing and are able to compare research studies, although they are much less able to apply psychological theory to underpin their observations of human behaviour. Marking is realistic in relation to examination

grades and the students are confident that they know how well they are doing. However, the assessment undertaken is not adequately used to plan for students of all abilities in lessons. Teaching generally does not provide the range of strategies and resources to teach to the range of abilities of the students present, so that the most able are insufficiently challenged and those of lower ability are struggling with expectations which are too high.

161. Subject leadership and management is satisfactory overall. The subject co-ordinator has been in post for almost two years and is developing her role in relation to identified areas for improvement such as the lower attainment by male students, the promotion of thinking skills and improvement of the range of strategies used for teaching so that learning and attainment are enhanced. The use of new technology is planned into lessons and used well by the students particularly for research on the Internet. There are few opportunities for students to have visiting speakers or make visits.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The strong emphasis on developing the design process and use of a range of new technology applications effectively supports achievement in coursework.
- Student behaviour and attitudes to their work are good and enable effective learning to take place.
- The range of teaching strategies and learning resources is limited and does not effectively meet the needs of all students; this impedes attainment, particularly at the highest grades.
- The range of courses offered is too narrow and does not cater effectively for the aspirations of all students.

Commentary

162. Achievement is satisfactory; progress shown in work seen indicates that students' standards currently in Years 12 and 13 are broadly in line with the national average. This is similar to the position at the last inspection. Results at A Level in 2003 were in line with the national average and were at a similar level in 2004. Teaching is accurate and challenges students who respond positively, producing coursework of good quality. Students' attitudes to their learning are positive; this supports satisfactory progress and improved standards by the end of the A Level courses. Work seen is of a satisfactory standard overall with higher ability students producing coursework of a high standard of manufacture and precise finish. Design folders reflect good use of the design process and a wide variety in the use of new technology for research, investigation and presentation. They have good access to a range of extra-curricular design activities, sponsored by local and national industry. This motivates and inspires the most able students who achieve very well.

163. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers are very knowledgeable in their subject area; they focus on developing further the design process, building on the every day experience of students. They support their developing knowledge and understanding of historical, environmental and sociological influences on design and manufacture. However, the styles adopted are narrow and do not develop sufficiently aspects of learning such as independent learning, creativity and innovation. This is one reason why students do not attain as many higher grades at A Level as they should. Students' learning is satisfactory, appropriately supported by good individual support from teachers whose assessment and feedback on coursework elements is good. This enables the students to focus on their next steps for learning. Students respond well, producing much coursework out of lesson time, selecting new technology and other resources with confidence. Their numeracy and literacy skills are well developed and this enables them to study effectively and present their work well. Teachers support the small number of students learning English as an additional language and those with special educational needs well and their progress is good.
164. Leadership and management are both satisfactory and have led to satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The head of faculty is very experienced, well established and competent. He is committed to increasing the number of students opting for design and technology courses and improving standards. Technology specialist status has enabled good extra-curricular enhancement through industry-sponsored projects; however, the range of courses offered is narrow and does not cater effectively for vocational qualifications.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

165. Art and design was inspected in depth and lessons were also seen in drama, media studies, music and photography. A Level results in **drama** were just above the national average 2004. Very good teaching and learning were seen in a Year 13 lesson where the students were totally engrossed because of the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject.
166. A satisfactory lesson was observed of **music** in Year 12, where the standards of the students' work was below average, reflecting the below average A Level results in 2004. A Year 13 lesson was much less successful because the teacher had limited previous experience and did not prepare the students effectively for the lesson.
167. Lessons of **media studies** were observed in Years 12 and 13. A Level results in 2004 were below average, but standards were higher than this in the Year 12 and Year 13 lessons. Very good teaching in the Year 12 lesson in which the teacher kept the students fully engaged, led to very good achievement and well above average standards. A Year 13 lesson examining the stereotyping of teenagers in the media was taught well, although the accommodation did not suit the purpose of the lesson.
168. **Photography** is a new course which has been running for two years. Facilities are poor as there is only one small darkroom which has to be well managed. AS and A Level examination results have been at national levels. Progress of students is satisfactory and sometimes good, as many students have no previous experience of photography before they start the course. Students demonstrate a good working knowledge of all aspects of photography including conventional photography, digital

imagery and new technology. Visits to galleries and studying the work of photographers provide good resources which students use well in their work. Teaching is good overall and students' attitudes and motivation are high as they often have to use non-teaching time for access to the dark room to complete their coursework.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising and much work in sketchbooks is of a good quality.
- Students use new technology well in their coursework, some of which is of a very good standard.
- There is insufficient space in the department to enable students to work on coursework in and out of timetable periods.

Commentary

169. Since the last inspection the department has increased the range of courses and attracted more students. The use of new technology has improved, as has the range of materials and three-dimensional work. Achievement is satisfactory overall and in some cases it is good. Students start the course from a high base of good GCSE results. They continue to make satisfactory and sometimes good progress through the AS and the A Level programme. A Level results dropped in the years following the last inspection, but are now on the increase. Past examination results have been below average. However, the improvements in 2004 have brought results in line with the national average.
170. Current coursework standards are above average. Work in sketchbooks is good and the variety and range of media being used by students is impressive. Students are confident in the use of a range of three-dimensional media, photography and new technology. From their research and use of museums and galleries, the students build a secure knowledge of a range of artists and use artistic styles well. They are confident in developing their work from first-hand observation and other visual imagery. They write thoughtfully about artists' work and are self-critical as they talk and write about their own work. Students are confident working on large-scale pieces as well as smaller scale work.
171. The teaching is satisfactory overall and sometimes good. Teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to plan thoroughly and to teach techniques and processes well. Teachers are skilled at evaluating the students' work, getting the students to evaluate their own work and setting targets. They provide valuable feedback so that no student is left in any doubt about what they need to do to improve their work. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and to make and justify their own decisions. However, although students know their minimum target grade for A Level, they do not always know what they need to do to achieve this grade.

172. Teachers have high expectations and use resources well. In response, students have a good attitude to their learning. They work hard and are very productive. They work independently in their non-teaching time and often fill the corridors in the department as there is no sixth form studio for them to work in outside of the time-tabled lessons. The teaching assistant works well with sixth form students, particularly helping them with their printing and photography. The small darkroom and the limited number of computers are used well by all sixth form students.
173. The leadership and management of all of the sixth form programmes are satisfactory. The number of students and the range of courses have increased over recent years and the facilities in the department have to be carefully organised to enable the students to make progress. Storage of large scale work and three-dimensional work is a problem that the department is aware of but has no plans to deal with. There is much work of an excellent level which is displayed in the department, but this could be celebrated more widely around the school.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

174. Physical education was inspected in depth and lessons were sampled in both leisure and recreation and in travel and tourism. Satisfactory teaching of the Year 13 lesson in **leisure and recreation** led to satisfactory achievement and average standards of work. The teacher ensured that the students knew exactly what they had to do as they researched for information about two leisure companies on the Internet.
175. In a sample of **travel and tourism** lessons, students made satisfactory progress by carrying out research into various aspects of the travel industry. They showed their understanding by explaining how different parts of the business interact. For example, they could assess the relative merits of various ways the industry tackles issues such as customer service provision and could justify their views well. The research work provided sufficient challenge and they worked well together and individually on their chosen area. Some students responded well to questioning on the theoretical aspects of customer service and are learning well. Others responded better verbally when asked to describe the findings from their research, such as their visit to Stansted airport.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in both Years 12 and 13 are high and students' achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good and leads to very effective learning.
- Leadership and management have been instrumental in improving standards and achievement since the last inspection.
- Students' attitudes are excellent and they have very positive relationships with their teachers.
- There is no timetabled physical education for all students in Years 12 and 13.

Commentary

176. Examination results have improved each year and in 2004 the number of students attaining A and B grades at A Level was very high. Results indicate that students achieve very well in relation to their prior learning. The number of students taking the courses has increased significantly. An increasing number of girls are involved and their attainment is very similar to that of boys. Students are skilful performers and take part in at least one sport to a very high level. Their learning is particularly good because teachers frequently link the theoretical elements of the courses to the practical interests and expertise of the students. Students' personal performance portfolios show very detailed analysis based on first hand experience. Their very good achievement is firmly rooted in teaching which enthuses students and gives them a confident approach to learning.
177. The productive work ethos in lessons is a reflection of very good teaching. Lessons are well structured and taught at a good pace. Teachers use a variety of independent, often practical activities and a wide range of resources in the theory teaching room to interest and challenge students. Homework is used well to give students experience in answering examination questions and to prepare them for new topics. Homework is marked thoroughly with comments that help students to improve their work. Students are extremely positive about physical education. They have very good relationships with their teachers and take an active part in the subject. This helps their very good learning.
178. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. Responsibility for the A Level courses has been delegated to a member of the department; organisation and planning are exemplary. Standards have improved significantly since the previous inspection and improvement overall is excellent. Three members of staff teach each unit of the course. Students benefit from this diversity of expertise. The digital camera and video programme is effectively used to improve students' analytical skills. Students report how much they enjoy and value the courses. The one shortcoming is that students in Year 12 and 13 are not provided with any timetabled physical education. This gives no encouragement to students to build on the healthy values promoted in Years 7 to 11. However, several sixth form students continue their interest in sport by attending and helping with extra-curricular activities.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good in all advanced level business courses.
- Advanced vocational standards are above average.
- Access to information and communication technology resources in the main business teaching room is inadequate.
- Complete and collated examination performance data is not readily available in the department.

Commentary

179. AVCE results in 2004 were above average, but A Level results fell from above average in 2003 to below average in 2004. This was largely because of a fall in the number of higher grades. Achievement is good overall. This is largely because teaching and learning are good and the students respond with interest and enthusiasm. Standards are above average at A Level in Year 13, and some very good work was seen in students' portfolios. Standards in the AVCE course are well above average. In the first term of the AS course, standards are average.
180. Lessons are well planned and challenging stimulus material is used. Students have opportunities to work in pairs or small groups where they are required to analyse, and discuss issues, support conclusions with appropriate data and justify corporate decisions. For example, in one lesson an interesting and challenging video about a construction company was used to good effect to enable students to analyse real problems and relate them to business theory as well as relevant consumer and safety legislation. Responses were generally delivered with confidence and supported with relevant facts. AVCE students have become effective independent learners and are good at presenting their work in class. There is further scope for more independent practical work in the other courses, particularly at an early stage at AS Level to encourage students to be even more independent with their research and more confident in the presentation of conclusions.
181. Students are encouraged to make good use of information and communication technology resources both in school and at home. Although there is a computer with Internet connection in the main teaching room, its display facilities are inadequate. This prevents whole-class use of the Internet for research and access up-to-date statistics or for spreadsheet modelling to manipulate and analyse business and economics data for discussion.
182. The leadership and management of the department are good. The department has its own access to assessment data on the school computer network. This is analysed well and used effectively to inform planning. However, the department lacks a clearly presented complete set of recent performance statistics, or an appropriate explanation of the basis for target grades. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

General studies

183. Lessons are generally taught well, with a range of activities that require the students to think, to develop some key skills and to reflect upon their ideas and beliefs. The students respond well, engage willingly in the activities and apply themselves with reasonable enthusiasm. They make good progress and achieve well in lessons.
184. Many students, however, place little value on the course or qualification. For some, the higher education institutions that they are considering do not require or encourage it. For others, the programme is too broad and, they say, fails to stimulate them. Consequently they lack real interest and motivation and the course has little

impact outside of that achieved in individual lessons. Many Year 13 students expect to achieve lower standards in general studies than in their other subjects.

185. Nevertheless the grades that were achieved in 2003 were just above national results and in line with those achieved by students in their other subjects. However, results fell to below average in 2004.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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