

INSPECTION REPORT

Highbury Fields School

Highbury Hill, London

LEA area: Islington

Unique reference number: 100455

Headteacher: Mr Bernard McWilliams

Lead inspector: Ross Parker

Dates of inspection: 27th -30th September 2004

Inspection number: 270362

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll;	780
School address:	Highbury Hill London
Postcode:	N5 1AR
Telephone number:	020 7288 1888
Fax number:	020 7288 2121
Appropriate authority:	Local Education Authority
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Tony Mooney
Date of previous inspection:	24 May 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Highbury Fields School is a specialist science college for girls, and is a partner with two other schools in the Islington Sixth Form Consortium. The school has been identified as a Beacon School and more recently as a Leading Edge School as part of a drive to support improved standards in other local schools. It gained a Schools Achievement Award in 2001, and Sportsmark in 2003. It is set in an area combining pockets of significant deprivation with considerable affluence. The great majority of pupils come to the school from the disadvantaged communities. Two thirds of pupils come from ethnic minority groups, and one third uses one of 38 languages other than English. Attainment on entry is well below average, and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well above average. The school is over subscribed and pupil mobility is low.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
300446	Ross Parker	Lead inspector	
10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector	
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21906	John Scottow	Team inspector	Science
20767	Jerry Royle	Team inspector	Information and communication technology English as an additional language
2866	Robert Battey	Team inspector	Art and design
3555	Carol Emery	Team inspector	Design and technology
15576	David Nebesnuick	Team inspector	Citizenship Geography
24127	Jim Kidd	Team inspector	History
12110	Roger Bailess	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Highbury Fields School is a **very good** school. It supports **very good** achievement and personal development, and provides **good** value for money. Pupils come to the school with knowledge and skills which are well below average. The secure and supportive school environment ensures that they steadily develop maturity and become more effective learners as they progress through the school. By the end of Year 11 pupils from all of the different ethnic groups have reached average standards, well in excess of those achieved in similar schools. The sixth form offers very good opportunities for pupils to continue their studies, and provides a good stepping-stone to higher education.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- An unusually high proportion of high quality teaching supports pupils very well to overcome a range of barriers to learning.
- The excellent care and very good teaching support very good attitudes and behaviour and a strong emphasis on achievement gives pupils a strong commitment to learning.
- Governors and key managers provide very good leadership to complement the headteacher's excellent vision and drive for innovation.
- The school benefits from being a richly diverse and highly inclusive community. ?
- Punctuality is unsatisfactory.
- There is very good support for pupils with special educational needs, and those who use English as an additional language.
- Some opportunities to extend and challenge the most competent pupils are missed in lessons where teaching strategies do not promote independence or higher level thinking, and there are too few opportunities for discussion.
- Provision for citizenship is unsatisfactory.

The school has sustained **good** improvement since the previous inspection. Staff have worked hard to support a good improvement in the standard of pupils' writing. Attendance in Years 7 to 11 has improved because it is very carefully monitored and there are effective strategies to reduce disruptive behaviour. The quality of teaching in physical education is now good. Satisfactory arrangements are in place for collective worship, and there is some excellent exploration of the weekly theme for reflection.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	C	C	C	A*
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	n/a	E	E	

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 **very good**. By the end of Year 9 standards have improved to be close to the national average. By the end of Year 11 they are average, and they are higher than average in geography, graphics, textiles, and art and design particularly. Compared with similar schools standards are very high.

Pupils personal development is **very good**. They show very good attitudes in and around the school. They respect each other and their teachers, and form very positive working relationships. They behave very well in and around the school. The very good teaching and high level of care

support them to develop **very good** spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Attendance is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11, though punctuality at the start of the school day is unsatisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education is **very good**. Teaching is **very good** with a high proportion of excellent lessons. This motivates and supports the great majority of pupils and students to develop very good learning habits.

The curriculum is good. The school keeps this under careful review and is constantly seeking to develop courses, which will offer success to an even wider range of pupils. The excellent day-to-day care, and well-organised guidance and support create a secure environment where pupils and students have the confidence to succeed. A very good range of out of school activities provides additional support for pupils' all-round development and achievement. This is helped by the good links with parents, and with other schools and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is **very good** and management is **good** across the school. The headteacher provides very good leadership to his very good team of key managers. Their commitment to continuous improvement is supporting middle managers to adopt the best practice which is found elsewhere, and to support all staff, including those who are long established and experienced, to embrace the idea that they should strive to keep on upgrading their performance. The governing body provides very good support and challenge to the headteacher because they have a clear and critical understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very pleased with the quality of teaching and learning in the school, and the secure caring environment it provides. Pupils also appreciate the quality of teaching, and particularly like the way that they can now express their opinions through the student parliament.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Improve the quality of day-to-day questioning and assessment so that high attainers in particular can be challenged to reach even higher standards.
- Improve the provision for citizenship.
- Continue the work to improve attendance and punctuality in the sixth form, and punctuality in Years 7 to 11.
- Develop more opportunities for pupils to work independently, and to develop the quality of their writing and exploration of ideas further through greater use of discussion.

And, to meet statutory requirements

- Report to parents on achievement in citizenship in Years 7 and 8.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is **very good**, and provides **good** value for money. Very good support and guidance ensure that students progress steadily as soon as they start their courses. Students show impressive maturity, both in their contribution to school life, and in their relationships with others. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection as the expanded consortium arrangements, and the appointment of new co-ordinators has improved the range and consistency of opportunities for the students.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students show very good attitudes and respond well to the good support for their personal development.
- There is a very good range of courses to meet the needs of a wide spectrum of students' interests.
- Good teaching supports students to improve steadily throughout their courses.
- Key skills are effectively developed and assessed across a range of subjects.
- Attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory.

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	Provision in English is good . Teachers have very good subject expertise and support good learning.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is satisfactory . Students' achievement is satisfactory. Teachers ensure that they have a good grounding in fundamental processes.
Science – Chemistry	Good . Very small numbers have enrolled for the course in recent years, but they are well taught. The consortium arrangements improve the learning experiences for all of the students.
Psychology	Very good . High quality teaching supports very good achievement with excellent opportunities for co-operative and collaborative work.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students are well prepared before they choose their courses, and are well supported once they begin. Teachers give very good guidance about the quality of students' work, and how they can improve it. They also track their personal development thoroughly so that students grow in confidence and poise. This raises their aspirations, and supports a high proportion to move on successfully into higher education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership of the sixth form is **very good**. The sixth form managers have established well-founded strategies to raise the profile of the sixth form. They have introduced more rigorous entry qualifications to raise standards in AS and A2 courses, and as a result the sixth form has grown in size. The governing body has a very good understanding of how the sixth form may be developed

further. Management is good as effective systems are in place on the Highbury Fields site. However, some problems with the organisation across the whole consortium have been identified, and the action plan to put these right is in its early stages.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very satisfied with provision in the sixth form. They appreciate the range of teaching styles, and they know how well they are doing. They also appreciate the individual attention that they get, and that the teachers know them well. The disciplined, organised, and secure structure of the school is also appreciated.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Standards are **average** overall. They are slightly **below average** in **Years 7 to 9** and slightly **above average** by **Year 11**. Achievement is **very good** for pupils from all ethnic groups in **Years 7 to 11**, and **good** in the sixth form. Standards are above average in science in Years 10 and 11. Standards in English, mathematics and information and communication technology are sufficient to enable pupils to make progress in all areas of the curriculum in Years 7 to 11, but written expression restricts some students' progress in the sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils sustain a continued improvement in standards as they move up through the school.
- A strong emphasis on inclusion supports all pupils to achieve well.
- Standards are below average in citizenship and in modern foreign languages.

Commentary

Key Stage 3

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.3 (32.4)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	32.7 (32.9)	35.5 (34.7)
Science	32.8 (34.4)	33.6 (33.3)

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

1. Pupils come to the school working at levels well below the national average. Overall skills in literacy are below average. A very high proportion of pupils use English as an additional language, and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well above average.
2. In the 2003 tests at the end of Year 9 standards were below the national average. The low literacy skills which pupils brought to the school undermined the performance of about a fifth of the pupils in English, and the proportion of pupils reaching the highest levels was well below average. It was failure to reach the high levels that held back the results in mathematics too, though in this respect the science results did match the national profile. Despite this below average overall picture, when these results were compared with schools in similar local contexts, and with schools where pupils had similar results at the end of Year 6, they were well above average.
3. Over the last three years the trend of improvement in these national tests in English, mathematics and science has been similar to the national trend, and was exceeding the national trend until 2003 when results dipped. This was because this particular year group included a much higher proportion of pupils with weak language and thinking skills. In 2004 the earlier trend of improvement was restored in all three subjects.
4. Achievement is very good overall in Years 7 to 9 as pupils progress well despite their low entry standards, high levels of special educational need and multiple home languages. In work seen during the inspection standards are now average in most subjects including English, mathematics and science, and above average in art and design. Standards are below average in information and communication technology (ICT), where recruitment difficulties led to the

school falling behind the national improvement, which the introduction of the Key Stage 3 Strategy¹ brought about. They are below average in citizenship where non-specialist teaching is not stretching the highest attainers, and in modern foreign languages, though in this subject these standards do represent satisfactory achievement.

Key Stage 4

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	56 (45)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95 (91)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.9 (33.5)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 126 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

5. In the 2003 GCSE examinations results were in line with the national average. They were very high compared with schools in similar local contexts, an improvement from the year before. When compared with schools where pupils had similar results at the end of Year 9 they had been very high over the last two years. This represents very good achievement. Results had improved faster than the national trend over the last three years, and were followed by a further substantial improvement in 2004.
6. Standards were below average in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, and for the small number of pupils in music and religious education. They were above average in science, ICT, textiles and graphics within design and technology, and geography, and well above average in art and design. The high proportion of pupils gaining accreditation at some level shows how successful the school has been at including pupils of all abilities and with a wide range of needs in the drive to improve standards.
7. Work seen during the inspection confirms the trend of improvement. Standards in mathematics are now in line with national averages, as are those in music. Current standards in ICT have not yet exceeded the national standards as they did in 2003.
8. There is a very rich diversity of ethnic groups in the school, and no group consistently achieves less than the others. There were concerns in 2003 about specific individuals, some of whom were Turkish, and others Bangladeshi, and the latter group did achieve worse than Bangladeshi girls elsewhere in the borough. In all cases the achievement was related to other factors than the pupils' ethnicity. The school monitors achievement by ethnicity at each assessment check-point, and form tutors work to support any individual who is seen to be at risk. Additionally the school provides high quality support for pupils from ethnic minority groups who are facing any difficulty. Recent significant improvements in the achievement of Turkish and Caribbean pupils, has been as a direct result of careful monitoring, intervention, and family support. Evidence from the inspection confirms that teachers support pupils from all ethnic groups to achieve as well as each other, and give high quality additional support to any pupil who is finding learning difficult.

¹ The Key Stage 3 National Strategy aims to raise standards by strengthening teaching and learning in all secondary schools for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. This National Strategy now affects all subjects. It started with English and mathematics in 2001 and now includes science, information and communication technology and teaching and learning in the foundation subjects as well as ensuring that all subject departments contribute to the development of pupils' understanding and skills in literacy and numeracy. For more information please go to the Government's Department for Education and Skills web-site: www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3

9. Pupils with English as an additional language achieve very well overall, 55 percent of pupils having achieved five A*-C grades in the 2004 GCSE examinations. Pupils' achievement is higher than other local schools. Pupils have individual education plans that are used well to plan appropriate and relevant tasks for them. In lessons there is a high emphasis on developing language by encouraging pupils to contribute to class discussions. Additional support for pupils with English as an additional language contributes very effectively to their progress. When this support is not available pupils are seated next to more confident pupils and this helps them cope in lessons.
10. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well. They are very well supported to improve their reading when they are taught in small groups. Teachers have clear information that helps them to understand pupils' individual needs, and they work with great care and energy to make sure that all pupils are included and able to achieve well in the full range of activities. The school has gathered clear evidence that pupils who have performed significantly below average in the tests at the end of Year 9 have overcome the difficulties that got in their way to do much better in their GCSE examinations.

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	79.8 (78.2)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	17.7 (12.6)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	189.6 (133.2)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 23 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

11. Results in A, AS and VCE examinations in 2003 were well below average. This is partly explained by the school's policy, determined by the governing body, to accept students on to AS and A-level courses with lower grades than is usual in most schools. This policy recognised that students could progress into higher education with just two pass grades at A-level. The school saw this as an effective way to build a learning culture in an area where experience of higher education was not extensive. In effect it has been successful, leading to good achievement, with very high proportions of students progressing from Year 13 into higher education over the last three years. It did, however, inhibit standards in sixth form examinations. Some students who had been well supported to learn for GCSE examinations found the independent work and some of the concepts involved in AS and A-level courses just too demanding. Current Year 12 students have been required to demonstrate higher grades at GCSE, and this, together with an increased range of vocational course now available, has increased the level of recruitment and the academic competence of AS level students.
12. Small numbers make it impossible to compare individual subject examination performance with national averages.
13. Inspection evidence confirms that achievement is good overall. Students show a serious intent to study, whatever the level of their previous attainment. The same level of commitment was seen whether Year 12 students on a GNVQ science course struggled with basic mathematical concepts that had undone their performance at GCSE, or the highest qualified AS students compared the attitudes to human rights that created Auschwitz with current events in Guantanamo Bay. They use ICT effectively in all aspects of their work, and make good use of discussion, showing an unusual readiness to listen and respond to what other people say in debate. The difference in competence at GCSE was reflected in history, where all the students in a Year 13 group could form a view about the events after Lenin's death, but only the highest attainer could give convincing reasons for her view. The level of oral confidence is not generally reflected in

written work, where there is little sign of more complex English forms. However, students at Highbury Fields bring different strengths. In sociology students from different ethnic groups work together in the utmost harmony, and bring a wealth of personal experience to the subject. In drama too, students combine speech, mime and dance to show high levels of insight in the craft of the theatre.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are **very good**. Attendance is **satisfactory** in the main school but **unsatisfactory** in the sixth form. Punctuality is **unsatisfactory**. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are exceptionally loyal to the school and each other.
- Pupils are interested in their work and keen to achieve very well.
- Pupils respect school staff and structures, so behave very well.
- Cultural diversity is a joy in the school.
- Almost all the pupils now attend regularly, but too many arrive late.
- A very small number of pupils do not behave as well as the school expects.
- Too many sixth form students miss lessons.

Commentary

14. Pupils develop excellent relationships with others and this is a major strength of the school. The atmosphere around the school and in lessons is extremely supportive. Very high levels of mutual respect and trust are evident. Pupils work very well together in lessons and this helps them to learn from each other. They talk enthusiastically about the extensive range of activities available to them, and participate eagerly. Pupils therefore take great pride in their school. Pupils enjoy their lessons and are keen to do as well as they can, so they work very hard. This diligent approach promotes high achievement.

15. Pupils' behaviour has improved since the previous inspection because the staff work relentlessly and successfully in promoting self-discipline and a safe environment. Staff nurture pupils carefully so pupils grow in confidence and maturity. They take good levels of responsibility for themselves and for others. Pupils treat property carefully and value the school's high expectations of their correct conduct. Pupils' behaviour is based on openness, equality, honesty and justice. The atmosphere around the school is calm and purposeful because pupils behave very well. Pupils state that staff manage the occasional incidence of bullying very carefully. A tiny minority of pupils misbehave, but the learning of others is seldom interrupted.

16. Everyone relishes the range of different cultures represented in the school. Pupils value strongly cultural, social and ethnic diversity. They treat others with high levels of interest and compassion, listening to them in a concerned manner. They welcomed learning about different foods during international week at the immensely popular breakfast club. Spiritual development is now good. Staff promote the thought for the week very effectively. Reflective assemblies foster calm and a sense of purpose for all present.

Exclusions

17. The school rarely excludes any pupil permanently. Staff use fixed term exclusion correctly and figures are lower than for similar schools.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	279	2	
White – Irish	16	1	
White – any other White background	86		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	32	5	
Mixed – White and Black African	3	4	
Mixed – White and Asian	4	1	
Mixed – any other mixed background	46		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	23		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	7		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	69		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	18		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	61		
Black or Black British – African	64		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	40		
Chinese	11		
Any other ethnic group	15		

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

Attendance

18. Pupils' attendance shows an improving trend since the previous inspection. The school promotes good attendance rigorously but a few pupils miss school for no good reason. The school works assiduously with the parents of these pupils, helping them to support their child's attendance. Pupils arrive promptly for lessons and a afternoon school despite being allowed out of the school with permission at lunchtime. However, too many pupils arrive late for the morning registration period.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	6.7	School data:	1.0
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

19. Sixth form students are determined to succeed in their lessons and wider activities. They enjoy the school and willingly commit to the school's routines and expectations. They present very good role models and participate eagerly in supporting main school activities. Peer mediators led a Year 7 personal and social education lesson very effectively with minimal intervention from the teacher. Attendance is not yet satisfactory. Most students attend regularly but a few are not

yet fully committed, despite good support by the school this year. The consortium of three schools has different registration procedures. Highbury Fields has introduced electronic registration and requires all students to attend registration daily. This is not fully operational and complicates detailed monitoring. Staff temporarily operate a manual system enabling correct registration.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is **very good**.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are both **very good** overall. Assessment is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships lead to a very good learning atmosphere.
- Teachers work very hard to ensure that everyone is able to learn effectively.
- Science and humanities teachers are imaginative and inventive.
- Teaching is unsatisfactory in citizenship.
- Teaching is very good in English and psychology in the sixth form.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 129 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9 (7%)	38 (30%)	53 (41%)	26 (20%)	3 (2%)	0	0

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

20. There is a solid foundation of good teaching across the school, enhanced by a high proportion of very good and excellent lessons, especially in science and humanities. In citizenship non-specialist teachers are too reliant on text-books and work sheets so that the lowest attainers cannot always cope with the work and lessons do not provide enough challenge for the highest attainers.
21. The two things that make the teaching special are the energy and pace which teachers bring to the lessons. They use their very good subject knowledge to plan thoroughly and they manage behaviour very well, so that pupils develop a serious commitment to learning as they move up through the school.
22. In the best lessons, in history and religious education, for instance, teachers have very high expectations, and use expert questioning to draw out understanding. They challenge the highest attainers to analyse what they are studying, and to consider different ways of looking at the information. The school improvement plan revolves around spreading the good practice developed here and in science across all other subjects. In some other lessons, including some good English and mathematics lessons, the questioning is less well developed, and opportunities to stretch the highest attainers and to support pupils to work independently are missed. In a few more ordinary lessons teachers allow question and answer sessions to slow the pace, because the questions are mundane, and some pupils become passive because they don't see a role for themselves in the discussion.
23. In almost every lesson seen teachers and support staff knew the pupils very well indeed and so were able to provide all kinds of extra help and support to meet their needs. This meant that the

lessons were highly inclusive regardless of whether some pupils had learning or behaviour difficulties, or were still developing their mastery of English.

24. The school is well equipped with electronic white boards and teachers across a range of subjects are using these well to engage pupils' interest, and to increase the pace at which pupils can understand concepts. One girl described how much more effective it was to see a simulation of a molecule breaking down on screen, than to watch a teacher drawing it by hand.

25. Teachers mark and assess pupils' work thoroughly so that they know how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Senior managers provide comprehensive information to enable teachers to judge whether pupils are doing well enough in their lesson, and whether they are on track to meet their targets. In history and in science lessons teachers are assessing pupils' understanding as each lesson progresses. They then adapt materials, methods, pupil groupings or the way they allocate extra support to compensate for any lack of progress that they see. This is not yet common practice in all subject areas, so some opportunities to push the highest attainers on even more quickly are not being seen.

Sixth form

26. Teaching and learning are good overall in the sixth form. They are very good in English and psychology, and some outstanding teaching was seen in drama, sociology and psychology. High levels of subject expertise and very good knowledge of individual students enable teachers to pitch their lessons with the right level of challenge. This builds students' confidence and motivates them to work very hard. This works not only for A-level groups, where drama students, for example, have been convinced of their capacity for excellence, but also for lower attainers. In key skills lessons, students who had not enjoyed much success in English and mathematics in earlier years were persuaded to discuss the educational maintenance grant. They already showed a capacity to listen and respond to each other, which was far better than they managed last year.

27. Though some lessons start slowly because of late arrivals, in most cases teachers create a brisk pace, then keep a close watch on every student, intervening at just the right moment to give support. In some lessons teachers give too much support, and miss opportunities to allow students to talk through ideas and deepen their understanding. In the best lessons in psychology and sociology questions are well thought out to stretch students' understanding, and teaching methods, including the use of ICT, and are imaginative and inventive. Teachers mark students' work carefully and give clear feedback so that they understand just what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is **good**. The opportunities for enrichment through extra-curricular provision are **very good**. The quality of accommodation and resources is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good supporting learning effectively.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and supports their very good achievement.
- The provision for citizenship is unsatisfactory.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum is good.
- Provision for vocational courses is limited.

Commentary

28. Overall, the curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of pupils. It is good in the range, quality of provision and in the resources to support the learning and achievement of all pupils. In history and art and design the curriculum is particularly effective in providing very well for the needs and

interests of all pupils. Access to ICT to support the curriculum is good. Pupils with special educational needs are given full access to the curriculum and provision is very good and as a result they achieve very well. Provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language is very good. Gifted and talented pupils are well catered for through out of school activities but in-school provision is in the early stages of development. Provision for citizenship is currently unsatisfactory because staffing changes at a crucial phase of development mean that there is no planned programme for the delivery of the subject.

29. The school is keen to further develop the curriculum and is involved with several initiatives designed to enhance teaching and learning. Teachers in mathematics, science, and design and technology have re-designed their schemes of work to include the best practice identified in the national Key Stage 3 Strategy. Similar work is now under way in English and ICT. The school is leading a project to explore and develop ways of increasing the pace and interest of lessons using electronic white boards. Teachers from within the humanities faculty are leading the development of current best practice in assessment. Curriculum review is a continuing process to explore ways of extending the range of courses offered in Years 10 and 11 to further meet the needs of all pupils, and a new course in enterprise and work related learning is already running in Year 10. Monitoring of the curriculum is systematic and senior management has a clear understanding of the current strengths and weaknesses and has plans in place to improve provision where necessary.
30. The curriculum for pupils with special educational needs is very good. After careful discussion with primary schools the special needs support staff re-assess pupils when they come to the school, and then devise clear targets for each pupil. Teachers clearly understand that they are all responsible for the achievement of pupils with special educational needs, and this is evident from the care, careful monitoring, and additional support that they provide in almost every lesson. In some subjects such as geography the most competent pupils support those with special educational needs, and both benefit from this arrangement. Small group work to develop literacy skills is very effective. A small number of additional support staff work well with teachers, and pupils' progress is tracked in detail throughout their time in the school.
31. The range of extra-curricular activities is very wide, and large numbers of pupils enjoy taking part. A daily timetable of events includes a variety of sporting activities, arts, music, clubs and study sessions. The school is busy long after the end of each school day, and the emphasis of the programme changes to guided revision in most subjects as examinations draw near. The library is popular and well used at lunchtimes, and there is good support for pupils studying minority languages. Pupils can perform in bands and choirs, as well as musical productions. They can visit theatres and concerts, as well as going on residential visits. Additionally there are regular opportunities to take part in enterprise activities and competitions organised by local companies and the education business partnership.

Accommodation and resources

Though **satisfactory**, accommodation is **inadequate** in some areas.

32. The school occupies a cramped site with little external space. Most classrooms are smaller than average and in some subjects such as textiles this limits the range of pupils' work. This is also true for younger pupils in physical education and there is only restricted space for drama and music. The school lacks office space for meetings with outside agencies. Corridors between classrooms are narrow but the good behaviour of pupils as they move around the school minimises potential difficulties. For sixth formers, however, there is only limited space for independent study. In spite of these limitations the school has planned effectively to reduce their impact. Accommodation is well maintained and the available space is used effectively.
33. Resources are good and they are used well. There is generous provision and access to computers, and good provision of other resources such as interactive white boards. These are

also well used to provide a visual impact, which quickly focuses pupils' attention at the beginning of lessons. The school library is well stocked. In history and geography resources are less good and teachers have to produce additional materials to supplement them.

34. The match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum is good. Nearly all teaching posts are filled with appropriately qualified permanent staff. This is the result of significant time and effort given by the school leadership. There is a balance of experienced and younger teachers. Support staff are used particularly effectively in science and design and technology where they are closely integrated into classroom work. In support of its recruitment of teachers the school has good links to higher education institutes. Trainee teachers work regularly in subject departments. Good progress since the previous inspection has been made in relation to accommodation, resources and staffing.

Sixth form

Overall, curriculum provision in the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have access to a very good range of courses through the consortium arrangement.
- Students' programmes of work are coherent and are monitored effectively.

Commentary

35. There is a very good range of academic and vocational courses available to cater for the needs of students who wish to continue their education. The majority of students remain at the school and follow AS/A-level courses but a small number follow courses, including vocational courses, offered at partner institutions. Careful management ensures that the different courses fit together to give students an appropriate challenge. Careful monitoring procedures have been designed to quickly identify any problems which may arise. The provision for careers guidance is very good and helps raise aspirations. It also enables students to choose appropriate courses and equips them very well for higher education and employment. The majority of students successfully complete their chosen courses.

36. Opportunities to enjoy other activities outside lessons are good, and students enjoy participating in music, arts and games, choosing from the wide range that the consortium of three schools can offer.

37. Accommodation and resources for sixth form students are satisfactory. They have a small common room and their own small computer network, which are used well by students from all three schools. There is, however, limited space for independent study.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes **excellent** care of its pupils. It provides **very good** support and guidance and promotes **good** involvement of pupils in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff promote excellent working relationships with pupils.
- Staff provide very good personal support for all pupils.
- The school consistently provides an environment that is safe and secure.
- Sixth form registration procedures are safe but not yet systematic enough to ensure rigorous monitoring.

Commentary

38. The school achieves an exceptionally caring ethos because staff pay constant attention to pupils' well-being. Pupils know, and comment, that their individual needs matter to the staff. They trust the staff implicitly and emphatically.

39. Key managers have introduced a range of strategies to ensure that this care is also systematic. Staff track pupils' personal development very carefully and are instantly alert to any changes in a pupils' demeanour. Tutors are alerted by regular progress checks where they use data from subject teachers about the standards, attitudes and behaviour that they have observed. Staff take prompt action to arrest any further deterioration and to help the pupil get back, and remain, on track. All pupils with particular needs know that specialist staff, such as learning mentors, deliver extremely sensitive help. The school provides good induction for new pupils so that pupils manage the transfer and settle easily. A barbecue for pupils and their parents is a positive and unusual feature of this provision. The residential trip in October helps tutor groups bond. Tutors remain with their pupils for five years and this fosters a strong sense of security and loyalty. Tutors use tutor periods very well to support their pupils. Pupils get good advice about options for Year 10 and 11 courses and for future career choices. The pastoral team is very well led, enhancing an already strong feature of school life.
40. Comprehensive arrangements for child protection are securely in place. All decisions concerning health and safety are based on well thought out risk assessments. Daily routines are planned and carried out meticulously. Action is taken to eliminate and minimise hazards. The school is kept clean and in good condition. Staff care for sick or injured pupils tenderly.
41. Teachers routinely track pupils' academic progress. They assess pupils' work regularly and share the outcomes with pupils. The science and the humanities faculties have an acute awareness of pupils' performance. Here teachers constantly use this knowledge to give very clear, helpful guidance on exactly how to improve. The support offered in other subjects is good, but is not as fully focussed.
42. The care, guidance and support for pupils with English as an additional language are very good. Language competence is assessed on entry to the school and induction courses are organised for those pupils who need additional help or who are underachieving. The local authority set yearly targets for pupils with English as an additional language and progress is carefully monitored by teacher assessments on a half-termly basis. The school has good links with the home and works closely with parents. All correspondence and newsletters are translated into the mother tongue.
43. Pupils with special educational needs are very well cared for. Their progress, welfare and participation in activities are constantly monitored, and support staff work closely with form tutors to ensure that all pupils have full access to all aspects of life in school.
44. Pupils know that their opinions matter, but not all can say how the school harnesses their views. The school actively encourages pupils to consider school improvement through the recently established school parliament. This has made a promising start and those involved speak highly of it. Systems for involving pupils are improving but do not yet engage all pupils.

Sixth form

45. Students value the very good support that teachers provide. New Year 12 students already feel valued and very well known to the staff. Teachers routinely monitor and guide students' work very carefully. The newly established, but very skilled, form tutor team provides high quality support. This secures improvement in promoting regular attendance despite difficulties with electronic registration across all three schools in the consortium. Staff give individual students the care and attention they need to make informed choices about their future careers. This very good support raises students' aspirations and ensures a high percentage continue into further education.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school helps parents support their child's learning in meaningful ways.
- Expansion into the Islington Consortium increases participation and choice.
- Regular outside trips and visits, and visitors to the school, enhance pupils' learning.

Commentary

46. Staff work hard and effectively to include parents in the life of the school. Staff know the pupils' families well and involve parents quickly when any intervention is necessary. Regular surveys, including some conducted on-line, ensure that parents' views are included in future school development planning. Any parental concerns are handled promptly using correct procedures. Staff are particularly careful about communication with the parents of children who have any special educational, or additional, need. The school arranges very effective support from a wide range of agencies, and ensures that parents are partners in this collaboration. Parents are therefore confident that the school meets their child's individual needs and value the support given.

47. The school is very committed to working in partnership with other schools. Close links enable staff to share and extend their expertise with other schools. An example is the recently developed information and communication technology project with the City of London Girls' School. Regular dialogue with local primary schools promotes secure curriculum links and efficient transfer of information about the pupils. Several departments have well-established links with primaries. This includes science, which has developed links over four years as a Beacon School² and is continuing this work as part of the specialist school status. Pupils enjoy a much wider range of courses and opportunities as a result of the new Islington Consortium. The consortium student council is already planning shared activities, and a new post of consortium director has recently been created to ensure that the partnership is effectively managed.

48. Few people from the community use the school, but pupils explore aspects of the local and wider community in a good number of ways. Regular visitors to the school enhance pupils' appreciation of their studies. Visits to theatres, museums and foreign trips broaden pupils' horizons. Parents and pupils praise and value the wide range of additional activities arranged by the school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **very good**. The leadership of the headteacher is **very good**. The governance of the school and the leadership of key staff are both **very good**. Management is **good** across the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the headteacher is very good and he encourages teachers to focus on how their pupils learn and how their teaching methods can meet individual needs.
- Leadership of the pastoral system is very strong and pupils' personal development is supported very well.

² Beacon School

This is a school which excels at one or more activities and has applied to and been accepted by the DfEE for Beacon School status. There are over 600 Beacon Schools in England. The scheme is designed to raise standards in schools through the sharing and spreading of practical ideas and knowledge between schools. A Beacon School will receive a substantial amount of extra funding to allow staff to work with staff in other schools, arrange conferences, training meetings and any other activity that is designed to improve standards in all participating schools. For more information go to the DfEE website: www.dfes.gov.uk/ then search: Beacon Schools.

- Governors are very well informed and have a very good knowledge of future priorities, with a clear understanding of their strategic role.
- The leadership of key managers is very good and they are dedicated to ongoing improvement of the school's provision for its pupils.

Commentary

49. Pupils, teachers and governors speak with one voice when they describe the work of the headteacher. He has ensured that the school's primary emphasis is on the achievement of the individual and has encouraged his staff to challenge every one of their pupils to perform at a high level in everything they undertake. As a result, barriers such as low literacy levels and external distractions are overcome, pupils benefit from very good teaching, and they achieve very well. The clarity of vision of the headteacher and the willingness of his staff to attempt new methods to meet the varied needs of their pupils are two primary reasons for the improvement in all areas of school life.

50. Senior staff are very effective and monitor all aspects of what the school has to offer its pupils. Teachers speak highly of the support and encouragement they receive and subject leaders play an important part in evaluating the performance of their curriculum areas. In most faculties, teamwork is of the essence and staff are open to new ideas. Although the quality of faculty self-reviews is not yet consistent, most teachers have a good understanding of where improvements must be made if pupils' achievement is to rise even further. Moreover, pastoral staff are committed to supporting their youngsters in both academic and personal terms and they know their charges very well. Pupils make very positive comments about the talents and industry of their form teachers and heads of year.

51. Governors are very proud of the school and accept their responsibilities with relish. They are never afraid to challenge the effectiveness of new policies and they question senior managers rigorously about the performance of the school. They are very well informed about developments and have a very clear understanding of just how the school may move forward. As a result, they play an active role in the school's achievements and are totally committed to its continued success.

Financial information

52. A recent detailed audit reported that financial management is of the highest order. Best value principles are applied very effectively. Balances carried forward from year to year have been maintained at appropriate levels. These are sufficient to provide for the new fittings and electronic equipment for the areas which are under construction. Governors have been obliged to set this money aside as external funding for the development has been reduced since the start of the project. Recent expenditure on science facilities and electronic whiteboards has had a clear positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	£3,974,379	Balance from previous year	£222,597
Total expenditure	£3,902,708	Balance carried forward to the next	£294,268
Expenditure per pupil	£5,003		

Work-related learning

The quality of provision for work-related learning is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a well established programme which provides a coherent experience through every year.
- The curriculum is being effectively developed to include more direct teaching of work-related skills and understanding.
- There is a good range of enrichment opportunities, which enhance pupils' understanding of work-related issues.
- There is insufficient assessment of pupils' skills in work-related learning

Commentary

53. Work-related learning has a good effect on pupils' achievements. Results in GNVQ information and communication technology are in line with the national average. Additionally this course and the vocational course in health and social care are giving access to pupils with a wider range of learning styles. In the sixth form pupils studying GNVQ courses are making good progress in relation to their earlier achievements, not only within the subject specific areas, but also in the development of key skills for employment. Pupils achieve well when they apply their classroom knowledge to real situations. In physical education they organise activities and coach sports activities in the primary schools, raising standards there, and developing their own responsibility and self-esteem.

54. Teaching and learning in this area are good. The programme is well planned, starting with an early consideration of careers issues in Year 7. It continues with demanding simulation activities using "The Real Game" in Year 8, and builds to a carefully organised programme of work experience in Year 10. Pupils learn effectively because the ideas and tasks are challenging, such as, discussion to devise a corporate identity and management structure of their company to operate in the real market place. Theory is carefully linked with practice. For example, pupils meet local mothers and their children to gain a better understanding of the health and lifestyle issues they have discussed. Planning for work placements is thorough and methodical, with careful interviews to identify pupils' needs and interests, and consideration of the possibility of completing key skills qualifications during work placements. However, assessment of work experience is currently underdeveloped, with emphasis more on the pupils' perceptions about the experience rather than an objective evaluation of the skills and understanding that they have developed. There is a carefully planned programme of careers education and a very good range of additional projects, which is supported by good links with external partners. The school has recently expanded the range of vocational subjects for pupils in Years 10 and 11, and two thirds of pupils are currently following this sort of course. There is a wider selection of similar options in the sixth form.

55. Work-related learning is well led and effectively managed. The established provision is carefully organised, and to meet future demand the subject leader has completed a thorough curriculum audit and developed a detailed action plan. In addition to timetabled provision there is an imaginative range of special projects to exploit the good links with organisations such as Crossrail and the City University. The school is consistently the chosen partner in such events because external partners recognise that their participation will be dependable and of high quality.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers relate very positively to pupils and give them pride in their work.
- Pupils work hard at refining and improving their work and they achieve well, despite persistent weaknesses in writing.
- ICT is used well to support pupils' learning.
- In some less successful lessons teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' skills in speaking and writing.
- Work in drama does much to increase pupils' confidence in the exploration of ideas.
- The head of department is driven by a desire to improve performance.

Commentary

56. Overall standards are average in Year 9 and just above average in Year 11. This represents good achievement in relation to the below average standards, particularly in writing, that these pupils bring to the school. Standards in the Year 9 tests have been on a steady rise from well below average to average. Standards dipped in 2003 but show signs of recovery in the most recent tests. Unusually, almost all pupils take the English language and English literature examinations at GCSE. Given this high level of entry, they do well, with overall attainment close to average. Given the current quality of teaching, standards are clearly set to improve. Pupils' understanding of poetry and other texts, revealed in their discussions and other work in lessons, is considerably better than results in examinations suggest. All pupils achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment. This is particularly true of the high proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language.

57. Teaching is mostly good and there is a growing shared awareness of the strategies that lead to effective learning. A striking feature of many lessons is the teachers' knowledge of their subject and their skill in providing a crisp and disciplined start to lessons, settling pupils quickly to their work. In many lessons teachers skilfully lead pupils to see the deeper significance of poems. Pupils respond well to the teachers' positive and good-natured attitudes towards them, even when they fall from grace. Less successful lessons are weakened through missed opportunities to extend pupils' understanding through effective questioning. In these lessons, teachers sometimes settle for answers that are not sufficiently challenging. This allows pupils to settle for ill-formed opinions. A key factor in developing pupils' confidence in oral work and in the exploration of themes in literature is the very good and sometimes excellent teaching of drama. Pupils apply their knowledge of dramatic performance well to the analysis of the plays they study. Some teachers use ICT to good effect in supporting pupils' learning. As a consequence, pupils are confident in using ICT in the presentation of work to their peers.

58. The department is well led and managed. A new head of department, has won the confidence of the other teachers in creating a sense of common sense of purpose and direction. Monitoring is skilful and sensitive and has done much to develop an understanding of ways to raise standards, particularly in writing. Pupils are beginning to show greater confidence in approaching written work. The department has improved well since the previous inspection, particularly in the standards reached and the quality of teaching.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

59. Standards of literacy across the school are average, with particular weaknesses in writing. Provision for the development of literacy has been slow to develop. The National Literacy Strategy has not been fully embraced. With the appointment of a literacy co-ordinator, there is now a keener sense of the importance of work in literacy, particularly in writing, in all faculties. The science and humanities faculties have led the way in developing strategies for the improvement of standards of literacy. The work in these faculties exemplifies very good practice. For instance, every pupil in history, geography and religious education has a literacy target. These are used well to improve pupils' presentation of ideas orally and in writing. In science, there are particular pieces of work identified that are used very well to focus on pupils' writing. These very good initiatives already bear fruit in the quality of much of the written work in these subjects.

Modern foreign languages

Provision for modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are well planned to build on previous learning.
- Pupils' work is accurately assessed and individuals are set helpful targets.
- Text book and worksheet activities do not sufficiently involve pupils in active learning.
- Opportunities for oral practise are too limited.
- Pupils' behave well and work conscientiously.

Commentary

60. Standards of most Year 9 pupils are a little below average in French and Spanish. Pupils of above average ability reach high standards and achieve well in reading and writing in these languages. Those of lower ability, however, do not progress beyond using simple words or short phrases, particularly in their oral work. In 2003 GCSE results were below the national average in French and well below in Spanish. The unconfirmed results for 2004 show a significant improvement in both languages and this is the overall trend. The school enters nearly all its pupils for a GCSE in a foreign language. This is a much higher proportion than nationally. When this is taken into account results are better than first appears.

61. The overall achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. In higher ability classes in Year 9 they make good progress in learning to write short letters about past or future events. Pupils of lower ability and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. A few, however, even by Year 9, have difficulty in recognising single words and understanding simple spoken French or Spanish. Those for whom English is an additional language progress as well as other pupils when the lesson is conducted in the foreign language. The achievement of pupils of all abilities is less good in speaking compared to reading and writing skills. They do not have enough opportunities to speak and to be challenged and corrected when their pronunciation is inaccurate.

62. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory though standards remain below average. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 produce accurate and lengthy written descriptions of their school. This is one result of their teachers' insistence on the redrafting of their examination course work. Pupils of average and below average ability, however, are often hesitant in oral work. This is particularly true in Spanish and in classes with a wide range of ability in Year 10.

63. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Detailed lesson planning includes good use of interactive whiteboards. This quickly focuses pupils' attention and helps lessons to start promptly. Work covered earlier is effectively revised and practised. Pupils' work is usually accurately assessed. Together with detailed marking and clear target setting this gives pupils good help in improving their work. Resources are well prepared but there is an overemphasis on using the textbook and

worksheets, particularly for reading and writing. Overall this supports satisfactory learning though it is often passive rather than active. Pupils are well behaved and co-operative in the majority of lessons. They maintain good levels of concentration although they are not enthusiastic learners.

64. Leadership of the department is satisfactory. There is effective day-to-day management of teachers' work although teaching approaches are not sufficiently consistent. There has been satisfactory progress since the previous inspection, particularly in relation to timetabling and the creation of different ability groupings. Improvements are still required to standards in Spanish.

Latin

One lesson of Latin was sampled.

65. In Year 8 approximately 60 pupils of higher ability study Latin. Provision for this group of pupils is good. They achieve well in understanding different forms of grammar and new language concepts. This results from well paced teaching which uses a good variety of activities. Their work is carefully assessed and the progress of pupils of all levels of ability is closely monitored.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of attainment and the achievement of the pupils are steadily improving.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are mostly very good.
- Pupils' progress is tracked well so that underachievement can be identified, but in lessons teachers do not identify pupils' misconceptions quickly enough.
- Pupils learn correct mathematical processes but do not always understand the underlying principles.
- The management of the department is very good.

Commentary

66. In the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, 65 per cent of the pupils attained the expected Level 5 or above, which was below the national average, but well above the average for similar schools. In 2004 this result rose to 70 per cent, which is likely to be very close to the national average. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, 40 per cent of the pupils attained a grade A*-C, which is below the national average. However, in 2004 this increased to 49 per cent, which is likely to be very close to the national average.

67. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards are now broadly in line with the national average in all year groups. The pupils achieve very well in the first three years and well in Years 10 and 11. They do so because of an exceptionally good attitude to work, particularly in the first three years, where changes to teaching methods are proving effective. The pupils work hard, take considerable pride in the organisation of their work, and respond quickly and often enthusiastically to their teachers' instructions. They listen well to the teacher and to each other in whole class sessions. Achievement is often particularly good for the pupils with special educational needs, and those whose mother tongue is other than English, because of the smaller classes and some very good support from their teachers and the learning support teachers. Higher attaining pupils in some classes achieve less well because they are not frequently enough challenged to think about the more complex issues and underlying principles behind the mathematical problems they are studying. At a more practical level, they often do not reach the extension work planned for them because they first have to complete all of the easier questions being tackled by the rest of the class.

68. Teaching is good overall in the first three years, but with a good proportion of very good teaching. In Years 10 and 11 it is also good overall, but there are a significant number of lessons which though satisfactory are less effective. This is because improved methods of teaching adopted in the lower years in line with the National Numeracy Strategy, which provide for pace and variety and engage the pupils' attention, have not been incorporated in the other years. Learning is good overall because all the teachers have good subject knowledge and can explain key processes clearly and accurately, with a good emphasis on using mathematical language. In all the lessons the exceptionally good relationship with the pupils creates a very good learning atmosphere, where all the time available can be used for effective learning. Planning is sound, but insufficient account is taken of the need to develop understanding of the concepts involved, or how to avoid potential misconceptions. In the best lessons the three part lesson structure is particularly effective. Here starter activities are used to review learning from the previous lesson or to practise key skills which help the pupils with the main part of the lesson. At the end of the lessons whole class sessions are often well used to summarise learning. In lessons where there are weaknesses, this is often because the teachers do not have a systematic way of checking the pupils' understanding of the concepts and mathematical processes being taught. As a result the work is sometimes either too difficult or too easy, and some pupils' misconceptions are uncorrected. This results in short term learning, and lack of challenge for the higher attaining pupils.

69. Leadership is good and management very good. The head of department gives very good support to members of the department. Assessment of pupils' progress over the course of each term is good. The teachers meet regularly to share good ideas about teaching and learning, and in most cases practices are consistent from one classroom to the next. There are good opportunities for many pupils to take part in extracurricular activities to improve their performance, and some good provision outside lessons for gifted and talented pupils. ICT is not yet used effectively to enhance teaching and learning. The staff in the department are hard working and dedicated.

70. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards have risen, and the pupils achieve better, especially in Years 7 to 9. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 has improved. Standards of management have been maintained.

Mathematics across the curriculum

71. Standards of numeracy are generally in line with national expectations, and enable pupils to apply number skills and knowledge successfully in subjects across the curriculum. In geography and history good use is made of this to enhance learning, and in science number and graphs are extensively used but in most other subjects there is little call for these abilities in the normal course of lessons. There is little evidence that pupils' numeracy is developed in subjects other than mathematics, although some good practice was seen during the inspection where the science teacher checked and developed the appropriate number skills needed for the lesson. In mathematics lessons in Years 7 to 9, the starter activity is well used to improve numeracy skills, although the teachers often tend to move too quickly away from productive mental arithmetic activities in their anxiety to get on with the main part of the lesson.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department has a clear commitment to raising standards.
- Pupils achieve well as a result of their positive attitudes to the very good teaching.
- Teachers are making good use of up-to-date methods and strategies.
- Marking and assessment are used very effectively to raise standards.
- Pupils' independent learning skills are not developed sufficiently.

Commentary

72. Results of National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 have been rising in recent years so that in 2003 they were just below average even though this year group included an unusually high number of pupils with weak basic skills. When pupils enter the school, standards are well below average. They achieve very well and the 2003 results were well above average compared with similar schools, with a high proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades. The test results continued to improve in 2004, and work seen during the inspection confirms that standards are now in line with the national average.
73. Results in GCSE examinations have been improving over recent years and in 2003 were above the national average with a further improvement in 2004. Work seen during the inspection confirms these above average standards and achievement is very good. Across all five years there are no evident differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils.
74. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good up-to-date knowledge of their subjects and they communicate this with enthusiasm. They plan thoroughly and use resources such as interactive white boards imaginatively to capture pupils' interest and so improve learning. They structure lessons well, with well-prepared practical activities, though in some lessons the pace is too brisk to allow pupils to reflect and consolidate their learning.
75. In the very good lessons teachers match tasks to the abilities of the pupils effectively. They challenge the most competent pupils in the top sets with demanding activities and probing questions. In a Year 9 lesson on acids and corrosion the teacher's questions were very effective in helping pupils to make the link between chemical theory and their own experience. Pupils are interested in their work and remain focussed in lessons. They have high esteem for their teachers and there is mutual respect so behaviour in lessons is very good. Teaching assistants with specialist science knowledge are very effective in their support of pupils with special educational needs so that they too achieve very well. In the best lessons teachers question very effectively and make good use of teaching aids such as mini-whiteboards so that they can continuously assess everyone's progress throughout each lesson. In less effective lessons teachers lead pupils to expected answers and do not give them enough scope to develop their own learning independently.
76. Assessment is very good. Examination questions are used well in lessons and in homework booklets so that pupils are clear about expectations and how to respond. Marking is very thorough and pupils are given clear guidance on how to improve. Well-designed worksheets and tables help pupils make notes and record practical work. Excellent use of self-assessment by pupils ensures that they know how to improve their standards. This was clearly evident in an excellent Year 10 lesson on the digestive system. All of these make a positive contribution to pupils' literacy skills.
77. Pupils make good progress in developing their practical skills and ICT is used well in lessons. Calculations and graphs help to develop pupils' numeracy skills. However, practical activities are sometimes curtailed because teachers try to achieve too much in the time available in lessons.
78. Leadership and management of science are very good. The head of department has clarity of vision and high aspirations and fosters strong teamwork in improving pupil success. Recent additional appointments of teachers, including an advanced skills teacher, have brought new ideas and strengthened the team. Teaching assistants and technical staff form an important part of the team making an excellent contribution to learning. The team provides excellent role models for the pupils. The department is very well organised and there is very good documentation. They have applied the National Key Stage 3 Strategy effectively to improve teaching and learning, and detailed schemes support teachers so they plan and prepare resources for lessons very well. Teachers analyse examination results very carefully and make good use of assessment data well to identify individuals and groups of pupils for additional

support. They make good provision for gifted and talented pupils through extra-curricular activities.

79. Performance management and science college status have focussed developments and there has been good progress towards targets. Very good staff development takes place, especially that led by the advanced skills teacher and through Beacon work with primary schools. Accommodation is good. The budget for the department is good in comparison with other schools. This is supplemented by additional bids, and finances are very well managed so resources are very good. This department has made very good progress since the previous inspection and is in a strong position to help further improve standards in the school.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have a good understanding of presenting information and use this skill effectively in other subjects in the curriculum.
- Standards in Years 7 to 9 are not high enough.
- Teachers do not check pupils' understanding sufficiently in lessons.

Commentary

80. The teachers' assessment of 14-year-old pupils in 2003 showed that standards were well above the national average. These results were not a true reflection of pupils' attainment because some important elements were not included in the assessment.

81. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards of 14-year-old pupils are below the level expected. This is largely due to inconsistent teaching and staffing problems in the past and, as consequence, achievement overtime has been unsatisfactory. However, since the beginning of the academic year staffing difficulties have been resolved and achievement has shown an improvement. Pupils' skills in presenting information are good, successfully using a good range of applications to present their work in other areas in the curriculum. Pupils have experienced modelling using a spreadsheet, but their understanding of how to create a formula for mathematical calculations is limited. Pupils have no knowledge of handling data.

82. In the 2003 GNVQ ICT examination results were in line with the national average as almost two thirds of the pupils entered achieved a pass or above. Pupils in Year 11 studying the vocational information and communication technology course are at the level expected of competence at this point in the academic year and achievement is satisfactory. They have a clear understanding of the use of a spreadsheet and use of formulae. Their knowledge of handling data is established but use of more advanced procedures, such as validation, a method used to check that the data entered is correct is limited.

83. The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory but better in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have good subject expertise, moving effectively around the class during lessons using their specialist knowledge to advise and help pupils to consolidate their learning. The majority of lessons start briskly with clear explanations of the work quickly capturing pupils' interest. There is, however, insufficient questioning after the initial explanation of lessons to check whether pupils understand what to do. Consequently some pupils are slow to start and teachers have to spend time re-explaining the task to individuals. Although teachers have good relationships and generally manage pupils effectively there are occasions when pupils are talkative and teachers do not insist on quiet when they are explaining a particular procedure. Again this means that pupils start work without a full understanding of the task leading to slow learning. At the end of lessons teachers often leave too little time to assess pupils understanding and too few opportunities for pupils to present their work to others.

84. The leadership and the management of the subject are satisfactory. The head of department has overseen the introduction of the national strategy for information and communication technology that has given a focus to the teaching, providing a balanced curriculum that is contributing to pupils' achievement. The school has a clear vision about the future developments of the subject and senior managers are providing positive support for the teaching team. The improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. However, procedures for assessment are in their infancy and yet to have an impact on standards. Pupils do not know the level they are working at or how to improve.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

85. The use of information and communication technology across the curriculum has improved since the previous inspection and is satisfactory. Improved resources have resulted in an increased use across the curriculum to support learning. The school has deliberately joined in initiatives, which are contributing positively to teachers understanding and the value of the use of information and communication technology in the curriculum. The most effective use has been with the interactive whiteboards that are being used by an increasing number of teachers, contributing positively to pupils' learning. Although not all subjects have fully exploited information and communication technology to support learning, good use was seen in science. Here pupils effectively used computers to measure acceleration with different forces. Very good use was also seen in music, using a program to support pupils' creative skills.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well in all years and are making very good progress in their acquisition of historical skills.
- Teaching and learning are very good and staff have high expectations of what their pupils can do.
- Leadership and management are excellent and, because teachers evaluate departmental performance closely, there is a clear vision for development.
- Teachers assess the work of their pupils accurately and give them detailed advice on examination technique.

Commentary

86. GCSE results were below average in 2003, but pupils did at least as well in history as in their other subjects and all attained a grade. Pupils' performance was much better in 2004 and over a fifth of those entered reached grades A* or A. Work seen during the inspection mirrors this improvement and, because teachers place emphasis on providing their youngsters with detailed advice on how to approach examination questions, standards are now in line with expectations. Moreover, standards at the end of Year 9 are also average and most pupils understand just how historians come to their judgements.

87. From well-below-average levels of attainment on entry to the school, pupils achieve very well during the first three years and make very good progress in their understanding of the nature of historical evidence and also of bias. Similarly, achievement in the GCSE years is very good and pupils are becoming increasingly aware of the reliability and usefulness of source material. They make quite perceptive comments, for example, about which sources are valuable to a pupil researching the differences between suffragettes and suffragists.

88. Pupils benefit from their teachers' relentless challenge and, irrespective of their ability levels or command of English, are fully included in lessons as a result. During an excellent lesson on

women and the vote, for example, more competent pupils supported those with English as an additional language very effectively and assisted them in their research. Moreover, because teachers offer their pupils regular and accurate comment on their progress and how they can improve their work, youngsters have confidence in their own abilities and are not afraid to express their opinions on historical issues.

89. Leadership and management are outstanding and the subject is co-ordinated with both rigour and sensitivity. High levels of teamwork are evident and teachers evaluate their work closely. As a consequence, the vision for the future and the plans for development are comprehensive and convincing.

90. The department has made very good improvement since the previous inspection and now advises several subjects on good practice in assessment. It is very well placed for increasing popularity and further success.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership ensures that pupils' achievement is very good.
- Very good learning is supported by very good and excellent teaching.
- There are very good relationships that encourage and support co-operative and collaborative work.
- There are insufficient planned opportunities for pupils to use their ICT skills in Years 7 to 9.
- There is currently an insufficient range of fieldwork visits.
- There is a very effective and comprehensive assessment strategy that provides all pupils with a very clear framework for further improvement.

Commentary

91. Standards are average in Year 9 and by Year 11 they are above average, judging from the work seen and the pupils' responses in lessons. There is very good progression in the pupils' learning and therefore achievement is very good for all pupils. GCSE examination results in 2003 were above the national average, with a good range of grades from A* to C. The department achieved the highest average point score in the school with all pupils achieving very well. The unconfirmed 2004 results indicate that 78 per cent of pupils secured A* to C grades, an improvement on the previous year.

92. By Year 9 pupils develop a very good range of geographical skills. They can analyse, for example, the effects of natural disasters on both social and economic life. By Year 11 pupils develop a very good understanding of the complexities of the weather symbols.

93. Learning is very good because of the very good and excellent teaching. Teachers plan and organise very well to provide a very effective and structured learning environment. Teachers have very high expectations of the pupils, who are very keen to learn and as a result the pupils show very positive attitudes towards their work and work very effectively in pairs and groups. There are some excellent question and answer sessions, with a very strong emphasis on key words and concepts with the full range of pupils making significant contributions. The teachers constantly look for higher standards from the pupils, and achieve them. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are very well supported by highly effective targeted teacher support so that they too achieve very well. In the excellent lessons the pace of learning is very fast with the pupils constantly challenged and urged to stretch their thinking. There is a very effective assessment strategy that provides pupils with a very clear pathway for further improvement. This strategy underpins and supports the very good learning taking place.

94. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The recently appointed head of department has an excellent vision of where the department is going. She has already identified the many strengths and few weaknesses. For example, although there is currently an insufficient range of fieldwork to develop pupils' interest in the subject an improved programme is in place for this year. Similarly the insufficient opportunities for ICT in Years 7 to 9 are being addressed through additional training of staff and a revision of the schemes of work. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good because standards, achievement, teaching, learning and leadership have all strengthened.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject makes an excellent contribution to the personal development of all pupils.
- The department is led and managed very well.
- Time allocation for the subject is still too low.
- Teachers have high expectations of all pupils.
- Pupils show very positive attitudes in class, particularly when working in small groups.
- The department does not have sufficient subject specialist teachers.

Commentary

95. In recent GCSE examinations, results have been below national expectations, although the number of entries has been small and those entered have achieved well in terms of their prior attainment. In lessons seen and work analysed during the inspection, standards in Years 7 to 9 are below those expected by the locally agreed syllabus, but this represents good achievement as many pupils enter the school with very low levels of literacy and subject skills. From Year 7 onwards, pupils acquire a good knowledge of Christian beliefs, as well as those of other world religions, and some detailed and imaginative projects on Hinduism were seen from Year 8 pupils. During Years 10 and 11, pupils achieve well to develop a very good understanding of spiritual and moral issues, such as euthanasia and comparative attitudes to abortion through the newly developed short course GCSE. Higher attaining pupils can write in depth on these issues and pupils with special educational needs or English as an additional language are supported to achieve well. As a result, standards are in line with national expectations by the end of Year 11.

96. The quality of teaching is very good overall. The specialist teacher uses subject skills very well to promote very good learning and gives ample support to non-specialist teachers on the short course. Teachers' high expectations give all pupils the confidence to take part in lively classroom debate. Teachers plan lessons very well and there is a wide variety of activities to stimulate all pupils, including very imaginative use of group work. As a result, pupils show very mature and positive attitudes to their work, as was seen in an excellent Year 9 lesson on the concept of love.

97. The department is led and managed very well within the humanities faculty. The issues arising from the previous report concerning the fulfilment of statutory requirements beyond Year 9 have, in large measure, been addressed. However, the time allocation for the subject is still too low and some topics on the short course GCSE cannot be covered in sufficient depth. The school has taken action which will resolve this important issue in the near future. Assessment for learning is used very well and there is a commendable emphasis on self-assessment and on raising standards of literacy. The quality of discussion on issues such as relationships and contemporary moral issues supports excellent personal development.

98. Overall, good progress has been made since the previous inspection. This is now a strong department with an admirable sense of teamwork. The key issues now are the provision of more curriculum time for the subject and more subject specialist teaching to build on the good progress already made.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well to reach average standards overall with very good standards in textiles and graphics. However, standards in food are well below average.
- Well-planned lessons, good subject knowledge and pupils' positive attitudes create a productive learning environment.
- Assessment is not linked effectively to planning so pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 do not build well enough on previous learning.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is very good but there are insufficient challenging opportunities for higher attaining pupils, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9.

Commentary

99. Overall, standards in 2003 were average in teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations in Year 11. There were marked variations in the GCSE A* to C grades obtained between the different materials. High quality teaching generates real enthusiasm for textiles and graphics where results were well above average. Pupils enter the school with variable experiences and skills in design and technology. This shows in resistant materials where results were average, and in food where they were well below average. Work seen during the inspection confirms the 2003 results. Pupils are given good opportunities to use a variety of materials and develop confident and competent skills using a range of tools and equipment. By the end of Year 9, pupils acquire a good understanding and application of a design brief, and develop specifications and planning to produce a quality product. In Years 10 and 11 they build effectively on skills and develop a deeper understanding of the designing processes applying them creatively to their product development. Overall, achievement is good with very good achievement in graphics and textiles. Pupils use ICT well to develop their designs and enhance coursework. The development of technical and extended language is good and is helping pupils to apply it to a range of writing in coursework.

100. Teaching is good with some examples of very good teaching. The majority of lessons are effectively planned offering a variety of activities to motivate pupils. When teaching is very good learning objectives are shared effectively so pupils are clear about what they are doing and why. Teachers' enthusiasm, good subject knowledge and high expectations make a valuable contribution to good achievement. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a thorough understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to obtain higher grades. In Years 7, 8 and 9 assessment procedures are not planned effectively enough into the units of work resulting in pupils repeating work unnecessarily. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well because of the very good support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants but a lack of challenge in some lessons hinders the progress of higher attaining pupils. Relationships are very good and pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject creating a safe and productive working environment.

101. Leadership is very good with good management. The head of department has developed a shared view and a strong commitment in the department to high achievement, and has sustained good improvement since the previous inspection. She is aware of the strengths and weaknesses within the department but strategies to ensure consistency in all areas are not specific enough.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. By the end of Year 11 they are well above average.
- Overall, pupils achieve very well.
- There are excellent opportunities for the pupils to represent their cultures in their work. Inclusion is excellent.
- The very good understanding of the subject by the teachers supports the very good teaching and learning.
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

102. On entry to the school pupils, standards in art and design are below average. They quickly make progress and by the end of Year 9 their very good achievements support above average standards. By Year 11 their achievements remain very good and they progress very well to attain well above average standards. Over the past four years GCSE examination results have been at least above average and standards are now well above average. Excellent opportunities are provided for pupils to represent their own cultures in their work. The inclusion of all pupils is excellent.

103. The quality of teaching and learning is very good with a high level of expectation and challenge. Work is well planned, supported by good assessment procedures and good regularly set homework. The marking of this and the indication of targets for pupils so they know how to improve are unevenly completed. In lessons targets are shared well with pupils and they are aware of what to do to improve their standards. Teachers use the good displays of previous pupils' high quality work very well to illustrate to the present pupils what they could achieve. Pupils show very good attitudes to their work.

104. The two recently appointed teachers for the subject are starting to work well together. Leadership and management are good and the head of department is clear about what needs to be done to develop the subject further. There is a good range of opportunities for the pupils to successfully use a wide range of media in both two and three dimensions

105. Overall the accommodation is unsatisfactory. The two available rooms are small and get cramped when classes are large. There is no separate accommodation for three-dimensional and clay work and for computers. Pupils rely on computer facilities elsewhere. As the main school is 15 minutes walk away this creates access problems at the time their work is being developed. Satisfactory resources are well supported by the provision of an ICT projector and interactive white boards. There has been a good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards and the quality of teaching and learning have improved.

Drama

Provision in drama was sampled and two lessons were seen.

106. Standards are above average and achievement is good. By the end of Year 9 most pupils are able to engage very quickly with a theme, and begin to devise ways of presenting their ideas. Their improvised presentations incorporate a good range of techniques, so that higher attaining pupils produced cleverly edited clips of action to represent different views of the theme "gossip".

107. By the end of Year 11 the most competent pupils have a refined command of voice and gesture, and even the least competent are not afraid to express their feelings when portraying real life situations. Examination results at GCSE were below average in 2003, though this reflects the above average number of pupils who opt for the subject, and the wider range of skills and confidence they bring to the course. The 2004 results were considerably higher, matching the improvement across most subjects.
108. Teaching is very good overall, though some opportunities for peer assessment are missed. Very carefully structured lessons enable the highest attainers to develop sophisticated skills, and give all pupils confidence to keep on improving their work. Learning is very good. Pupils are highly collaborative, well aware of the quality of their work and know how to improve.
109. The high standards seen in the previous inspection have been effectively maintained.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good teaching encourages pupils to work hard and behave well.
- Music is popular and many more pupils now choose it as an option subject.
- All pupils use music software very well to support their learning.
- Group work is restricted by the limitations of the accommodation.

Commentary

110. The teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 for 2003 and 2004 were broadly average. The results in the GCSE examinations were below average for the few pupils who were entered. Because numbers were small pupils were taught outside of the normal school timetable. This is not now the case and the subject now has a greater status in the school.
111. The standards seen in Years 9 and 11 are broadly average. Because many pupils enter Year 7 with few musical skills this represents good all-round achievement. Most pupils including those from diverse ethnic backgrounds and those who have special educational needs enjoy music and make good progress.
112. Good teaching in Years 7 to 9 encourages pupils to learn well. This has a positive influence over their attitudes and behaviour, and has encouraged double the number of pupils to opt to study the subject to GCSE level. From Year 7 pupils develop skills and knowledge in singing, rhythm work and composing using ICT. By Year 9 pupils use music software with ease and compose with confidence using layering techniques. Singing features in all lessons and songs with professional backing tapes and visual images help to raise standards. As there is insufficient room for group work to take place this inhibits pupils learning through group improvisations. Assessment is good and pupils know about levels because these are introduced into each lesson so they know what their targets should be. Good teaching in Years 10 and 11 leads to a positive commitment from the pupils. They have a better understanding of melodic shape and harmony and those who are talented confidently plan extended compositions using musical software. The choirs, instrumental groups and cultural visits provide opportunities that enhance pupils' musical experiences.
113. The leadership is good and the head of department has a clear vision of where the department is going. Management is also good and data is used well. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the department is very good.
- Teachers have high expectations.
- The sports co-ordinator programme enables pupils to experience a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- A lack of facilities restricts the taught curriculum.

Commentary

114. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average overall. Pupils are encouraged to take a full part in physical education. Standards in the core physical education for Years 10 and 11 are average. Achievement is good overall. In Years 7 to 9 pupils show enthusiasm and work hard to improve their skills. Pupils with special educational needs are encouraged to take a full part in physical education, integrate well into lessons and make very good progress.
115. Teaching and learning are good with many very good features. Teachers work hard to include all pupils and challenge individuals to reach higher levels of achievement. In a Year 7 lesson the teacher chose pupils to demonstrate and these good demonstrations encouraged other pupils to work hard to improve. In netball, Year 9 pupils were constantly urged to move quickly to block their opponents and they showed obvious enjoyment. Relentless questioning about rules and coaching points help pupils to gain a deeper understanding of their part in the game.
116. Leadership of physical education is very good. There is a clear vision and teachers work closely as a team, being good role models and demanding good behaviour from pupils. Management of physical education is good and teachers are given good opportunities to develop their professional skills.
117. The recently introduced GCSE course in physical education is a natural step for pupils with aptitude and enthusiasm for the subject. The onsite facilities for physical education are limited and cramped and this restricts a broader curriculum. However, the sports co-ordinator programme enhances opportunities for physical education in all year groups and the use of the local sports centre broadens the taught curriculum in Years 10 and 11.
118. The department has made very good progress since the previous inspection. Teaching is now at least good and much of it is very good. Pupils have responsibility for kit, for moving games equipment and for leading warm-up activities. This contributes to their enjoyment and higher participation rates overall as pupils respond well to the challenges set by their teachers.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal social and health education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A coherent programme in Years 7 to 9 is effectively supplemented by contributions from the majority of subject areas.
- The arrangements for Years 10 and 11 are complicated and pupils do not fully understand them.
- Very good relationships contribute to effective personal development.

Commentary

119. Standards within the taught elements of the personal social and health education course are average in all years. There is considerable variation between groups, depending on the level of challenge and stimulation within the lesson. Discussion skills are less competent than you would expect in Years 7 to 9. By Year 11 pupils have developed a maturity, which refines the quality of both listening and spoken contributions though these are expressed simply and often in everyday language. In one innovative Year 7 class taught by two Year 12 mediators, pupils showed above average awareness of the role of body language in relationships. A Year 8 group showed good consideration for others, but had few ideas on how to boost self-esteem.
120. The overall quality of pupils' personal development throughout the school is very good. Major factors supporting this development are the very good relationships between teachers and pupils. This is especially the case with form tutors who stay with their classes over several years and get to know them very well. As a result they are well equipped to teach the basic personal social and health education programme which occurs once each week through Years 7 to 9 and both teaching and learning are satisfactory. Because some people are teaching outside their specialist areas they can be over reliant on text-books and work sheets, and do not always adapt the work to challenge the most competent pupils. However, they often compensate for this when teaching their own specialisms and make strong contributions to all aspects of personal development.
121. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Responsibility for the subject has recently been passed from one teacher to another. In an imaginative attempt to broaden the whole curriculum the school has adopted a complex arrangement where personal social and health education is substituted for another subject each week for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Though the overall quality of relationships remains, and pupils enjoy the lessons, they do not give the work the same priority as they do to their examination subjects, and find it hard to anticipate which lessons will be swapped round. This is not an effective arrangement.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are opportunities for pupils to take part in responsible actions within the school, however, they are not regularly or systematically monitored or evaluated.
- Leadership is unsatisfactory because there is insufficient vision about future development of the subject.
- There is insufficient recording and analysis of the pupils' progress and achievement.
- The range of learning strategies is too narrow to be effective and is not well supported by effective teaching over time.
- There is insufficient clarity about the delivery and the monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum, in the schemes of work.

Commentary

122. A very limited amount of work was available for scrutiny particularly from Years 10 and 11. From the evidence available, standards are below average in both Year 9 and Year 11. The range of writing opportunities is very limited though there are examples of questionnaires with tick box answers. A similar pattern appears throughout all years. As a result of this very limited range of learning strategies, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to effectively develop their skills, particularly writing at length. Although much of the course is through discussion, there is no recording of pupils' contributions. There is very little progression and development of learning throughout the course and achievement is therefore unsatisfactory both in Year 9 and in Year 11.

123. Teaching and learning in all years are unsatisfactory because of the very limited range of learning opportunities made available to pupils over time. There is very little evidence of regular homework set or marked or of class work monitored, evaluated or supported in a systematic way. There are insufficient examples of effective teaching strategies to support an effective programme of learning. In the small number of lessons seen in Years 7 to 9 both the teaching and the learning were satisfactory because of the strong relationships and the pupils' willingness to learn. The curriculum class material does not provide sufficient challenge for the full range of pupils, particularly the higher attainers.
124. There is a satisfactory range of opportunities for pupils to become involved in active citizenship within the school, including the school parliament and fund raising days, however, the acquisition of the citizenship skills is not systematically monitored or evaluated and therefore does not form part of a coherent curriculum. The overall assessment strategy is unsatisfactory because there is insufficient monitoring of the pupils' skills oral, written and activity based. As a result neither the teachers nor the citizenship co-ordinators have a clear enough picture of what aspects of the curriculum need to be developed further to ensure the satisfactory progress of each pupil. The pupils themselves are unaware of what understanding and skills they need in order to improve. The pupils' progress is currently not being reported to parents in Years 7 and 8.
125. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory because there is a lack of clarity about how much of the curriculum is delivered in the citizenship lessons and how much through individual subjects. The schemes of work are incomplete, reflecting insufficient and ineffective forward planning. There are joint co-ordinators of the subject; however, it is unclear how the strategies for developing teaching and learning, assessment, staff training and record keeping are being managed across the subject.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	3	100	65.2	0	11.3	26.7	20.6
Business Studies	1	100	76.4	0	17.6	30	26.2
Chemistry	2	0	72.7	0	15.7	0	24.1
Communication Studies	6	66.7	86.4	0	27.4	20	32
Drama	2	100	86.5	50	22.3	50	30.6
French	1	100	78.2	0	17.9	40	27.6
Design Technology	2	100	74.9	0	20.2	30	25.3
General Studies	5	60	73.9	0	19.3	16	25.7
Geography	4	75	74.3	0	24	17.5	26.5
History	3	100	81.8	0	21.8	30	29.7
Information Technology	8	75	69.8	35	12.5	27.5	22.8
Mathematics	2	0	67	0	19.1	0	24.4
Psychology	4	25	72.3	0	19.4	10	25.8
Physics	1	100	79.4	0	22.6	20	29.1
Sociology	4	50	73.3	0	20.5	17.5	26.4

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
Biology	6	100	96.8	33.3	42.1	76.7	80.7
Chemistry	5	100	98.1	0	52.3	64	87.3
Communication Studies	3	100	99.6	33.3	41.1	66.7	84.1
Drama	4	100	99.7	0	43.7	65	85.4
English Literature	1	100	99.6	100	46.7	100	86.7
Design & technology	1	100	98.8	0	42.7	80	83.3
Geography	2	100	08.9	0	50.3	70	87.7
History	2	100	99	50	48	70	86.2
Information Technology	7	100	96.3	0	26.2	57.1	71
Physics	2	100	97.9	0	50.5	50	81.7
Psychology	7	71.4	98	42.9	45.5	60	81.8
Sociology	2	100	98.5	0	46.4	70	83.6
Art & Design VQ	11	81.8	73.8	63.6	28.1	83.6	76.3
AVCE Business Education	1	0	69.6	0	17.9	0	63.7

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and Social Care (Foundation)	5	100		20		20	
Science (Foundation)	1	100		100		0	
Health & Social Care (Intermediate)	6	83		17		0	
Business (Intermediate)	3	67		0		0	
ICT (Intermediate)	5	100		60		0	

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are successful in introducing students to A-level work so that all achieve well.
- The students work well in groups and when learning independently.
- There are occasions when teachers do not build well enough on students' discussions to improve writing.
- The leadership of the department is clearly focussed on raising standards of attainment.

Commentary

126. Overall standards in the sixth form are below average. Too few students sat the most recent examinations to make meaningful comparisons with national figures. However, of those who sat the examinations almost all attained a pass grade. The unconfirmed results of the 2004 examinations show that students continue to do well in relation to their low levels of attainment on joining the sixth form. They achieve well in understanding the texts they study, but weaknesses in writing make it difficult for them to communicate their understanding to best effect in examinations. Almost all students complete their courses and are keen to learn.
127. Teaching is very good overall in both Years 12 and 13. The main strength is the teachers' knowledge of what they teach and the skill with which they steadily increase the demands of the work provided. Teachers encourage the students to rise to the challenge of sixth form work and give them the will to succeed to the full extent of their capabilities. Lessons are a good mixture of independent and group work where students have the opportunity to test their ideas. There are some missed opportunities to improve writing through good use of discussion and debate whereby students experiment more with ideas and learn to express them precisely in speaking and writing.
128. The subject is well led under the new head of department. There is a strong determination to raise standards. This already shows itself in the students' enthusiasm for their work and their knowledge of how to succeed. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The department is steadily becoming a cohesive group of well-informed teachers with a desire to move forward on many fronts.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

129. Students in the sixth form have below average skills. Though they are often articulate, and listen to each other in discussion more carefully than is usual, their written expression lags behind. Most have not read widely, so they have a limited reference base on which to base their writing, and a limited vocabulary. Many find writing and note taking challenging and there is little evidence of them using more complex forms of English expression. In some cases teachers do not help this situation by taking responsibility for reading on students' behalf, and missing opportunities to develop literacy skills.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have sufficient mathematical skills on entry to cope adequately with the course requirements.
- The achievement of the students is satisfactory because they have a good attitude to work, but this is limited by poor organisation in their exercise books.
- Teachers ensure that the processes and methods are well taught but teachers do not spend sufficient time ensuring that students fully understand the basic principles they are using when they solve mathematical problems.

Commentary

130. Standards of work seen are generally in line with national norms. There is a healthy increase in the numbers studying mathematics AS and A2 level in the consortium with neighbouring schools, although at present there is an imbalance of numbers, with fewer girls remaining at school to study in the sixth form.
131. Overall the achievement of the students is satisfactory. They work hard, with a fair degree of independence, helping and supporting each other. Attainment on entry is generally appropriate to the requirements of the course, and in particular the standard of algebraic competence meets most of the requirements of the modules the pupils are studying. Work in exercise books is sometimes too informally organised which can give rise to unnecessary errors, and the students do not systematically separate important notes and examples from practise exercises. In addition they do not always mark their own work in a way that clarifies what is correct and what is incorrect, limiting the usefulness of their work for revision.
132. Teaching overall is satisfactory. In some cases insufficient time is spent exploring why they tackle specific problems in a particular way, so that students develop a better understanding of underlying concepts. A good example was seen of some higher attaining pupils being given additional more challenging work.
133. Management of the course is satisfactory, with a helpful system of rotating responsibility for the different modules between the schools concerned to ensure that all the teachers on the course develop a good all round appreciation of the requirements. It is not possible to judge improvement since the previous inspection, as there was limited comment on sixth form courses in the report.

Mathematics across the curriculum

134. Standards of numeracy in the sixth form are generally satisfactory for students to access areas of the curriculum outside mathematics. Standards of algebra are adequate for the requirements of the modules studied in the mathematics AS and A2 examinations.

SCIENCE

The focus was on chemistry, but biology was sampled. In biology, results have been average when compared with all schools and in line with expectations. The subject is popular in Year 12, and about half of the students continue into Year 13. In the one Year 12 lesson seen teaching and learning were very good. The teacher used the interactive whiteboard very effectively during the lesson that included practical work and self-assessment. Students worked enthusiastically so that they made very good progress. Students are achieving good standards in their work in this subject.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Experienced teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and its assessment.
- Well-motivated students bring very positive attitudes to the course.
- Accommodation and resources are good.
- There are organisational difficulties with the consortium arrangements.

Commentary

135. Only small numbers of girls from Highbury Fields have taken chemistry at A-level as part of the sixth form consortium arrangements. There were no entries for girls in 2002 or 2004. All girls entered in the last five years have achieved pass grades. In 2001 one girl achieved grade A, but there were no grades A or B in 2003. Results are below the national average for all schools, but have been approaching the grades predicted from performance at GCSE. Nine girls with a wide range of GCSE scores took AS level in 2004 and four achieved pass grades.
136. In the current Year 12 there are nine girls being taught with nine boys from the consortium. In Year 13 there are two girls and two boys. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average. Students make good progress in lessons and achievement is good. In Year 12 students quickly settle into the course and build on their knowledge from GCSE. In Year 13 they are well organised in their work and know how to improve their standards. Retention within each year group is good.
137. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The experienced teachers communicate their expert knowledge with enthusiasm. Teachers know the abilities of the students well and use a wide range of suitable learning activities. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively in some lessons. The course books are well supplemented with additional worksheets. Consortium arrangements increase the size of the teaching groups, improving the quality of the learning experiences for both girls and boys. Students work co-operatively in the lessons and there is a purposeful working atmosphere. Students in Year 13 carry out practical work, such as comparing how different catalysts work, with confidence. Teachers use effective questioning during discussions in lessons to test students' knowledge and understanding so that all students are challenged. Teachers mark thoroughly with useful written comments for improvement that they follow up in lessons. They monitor students' progress against individual targets by regular assessments, and give additional support to individual students who are not making sufficient progress.
138. Leadership of the subject is good and shows strong commitment to improvement. The two teachers at Highbury Fields work very closely and there are regular meetings with the other teachers in the consortium. Teaching is divided equally between two schools in the consortium. Teaching is in double lessons, so that in alternate years there are two double lessons at one school with one double lesson at the other school. This improves teaching time by giving sufficient time for practical work and reducing the time spent moving between sites. The system works best when there is one teacher in each school for each year group, but this is not always possible and the unequal split in each year means it is more difficult to co-ordinate coursework assessment. Despite the organisational problems the consortium arrangements benefit the students. Teachers analyse assessment data carefully to produce action plans for improvement. Accommodation is good and there are good resources for advanced work in chemistry, including ICT equipment. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

139. Information and communication technology was sampled in Years 12 and 13. Teaching was good in both the lessons observed and students achieve well. In a Year 12 group where students were reporting on recreational activities in Islington the teacher combined an effective presentation with small group discussions to help students to match their presentations to the needs of their audience. In a Year 13 class the very good relationships and the teacher's imaginative approach supported students' high levels of motivation and enjoyment of the course. There were seven entrants for both the AS and A-level examinations in 2004, and five passed at each level.

HUMANITIES

140. **History** was sampled in Year 13. In the one lesson observed where students considered the power struggle after Lenin's death teaching was very good. Students achieve very well because the teacher has a profound knowledge of the subject, and works very hard to ensure that each member of the small group plays an active part in all parts of the lesson. Students enjoy the subject and feel that they are always fully stretched, but always well supported. In 2004 all eight students who entered passed AS level, and one achieved a B grade. Two of the three A-level entrants passed, one with a B grade.

141. **Sociology** was sampled in Years 12 and 13. In the two lessons observed teaching was very good, and students are achieving very well. Superb questioning challenged Year 12 students to think about different family structures, and to examine their own views for stereotypes. The teachers subject knowledge and ability to think on her feet helped to maintain a brisk pace of learning. In a smaller Year 13 class similar expert questioning in a quieter seminar atmosphere enabled students from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds to articulate their wealth of experience which is relevant to the subject. In 2004 all six students who entered AS level passed, and one achieved a B grade. The nine A-level entrants passed, with one B and one A grade.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement are improving and are now above average.
- Excellent leadership supports the teachers' high expertise.
- The excellent command of the subject is reflected in the very good teaching and the very high expectation and challenge for the students.
- The excellent preparation of ICT teaching resources gives the students a very good range of opportunities to learn very well independently and co-operatively.

Commentary

142. In the past some students have been entered for the final examination without them satisfactorily completing their course work. Here they achieved a below average standard and this depressed the overall standards which were broadly average in 2003, when a small number of students took the course. In 2004 the pattern was similar. The school has now taken appropriate action and has increased the entry criteria for the course. Samples of the students present work and observations in lessons indicate standards are above average and the students are achieving very well.

143. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Very good teaching is characterised by very good subject expertise. This leads to very high expectations and challenge for the students. Their independent and collaborative learning is very well supported by the recent excellent preparation of ICT resources. These were very effectively used in a lesson where Year 12

students looked at the different ways in which people remember things. The assessment of the students' work is good. Marking is supportive and students are beginning to be introduced to targets to achieve to improve their overall understanding of the concepts introduced in the course.

144. The leadership of the course is excellent and management is good. In the two years the course has been offered the head of the subject has very thoroughly examined and interpreted the examination board requirements. He shows an excellent clarity of vision for further developments and works closely with the other teacher. This supports very well the increase in standards. The subject was not taught at the time of the previous inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

145. **Drama** was sampled in Year 13 at Alevel. In the one lesson observed where students were working on devised pieces combining dance, movement and drama, students achieved very well. This was because the excellent teaching engaged them totally from the very start. The teacher's excellent example had given students confidence to excel themselves, and they made very good gains in their own use of language to evaluate each other's work. In 2004 13 students entered the AS level examination and 11 passed, with two students achieving B grades. All six students who entered A-level passed, and one achieved a B grade.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

146. Two lessons of **personal social and health education** and **citizenship** were sampled in Year 12. In a lesson looking at different learning styles students on the GNVQ health and social care course achieved very well because of very good teaching. The teacher's careful management, good knowledge of individual students and skilful questioning drew even initially reluctant students into the activities. The teacher also made very good use of praise which gave an effective and much needed boost to pupils self esteem. A lesson exploring human rights involved a specialist teacher working with different classes each week. Her very high quality presentation prompted students of all abilities to reflect on past and current abuses of human rights, though opportunities to assess their responses were missed.
147. Four lessons of **key skills** were sampled in Year 12. In each the teaching was good, skilfully building momentum after a slow start by students taking different vocational courses. The majority of these students had limited success in GCSE examinations because their basic communication and number skills were not well developed. As a result they are cautious when these skills are challenged. In each case the teacher gauged the level of expectation well, so that students felt stretched but confident. Some continued to discuss a number problem after the lesson ended and others listened carefully to different points of view in a discussion. All felt well supported to improve. In 2004 almost half of the students in the sixth form gained a key skills qualification equivalent to a GCSE.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	2	2
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	3
Overall standards achieved		2
Pupils' achievement	3	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	5	4
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	3	2
How well pupils learn	3	2
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		1
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	3	3

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