

INSPECTION REPORT

NETHERHALL SCHOOL

Maryport

LEA area: Cumbria

Unique reference number: 112382

Head teacher: Mr D Sibbit

Lead inspector: Mr B A Jones

Dates of inspection: 21 - 24 February 2005

Inspection number: 271706

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

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Terms used in this report

Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are at Key Stage 3, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools after Year 6. Students in Years 10 and 11 are at Key Stage 4 of their education. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the sixth form, in Years 12 and 13. Students in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for students and students of all ages at school.

At the end of Year 9, students aged 14 take national tests in English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the students know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, students aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**) or the National Vocational Qualification (**NVQ**). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to these awards, including the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (**AVCE**), or to those of the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (**A-level**). Students may take examinations leading to the Advanced Subsidiary award (**AS**), equivalent to half the difficulty of the full A-level, which is gained by further study beyond AS standard. Some students may also take Advanced Extension Awards (**AEA**).

Inspectors judge the standards reached by students by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for students of the same age nationally. The students' achievements reflect whether they are doing well enough. These judgements take account of the educational value added over time. In this report, similar schools are defined as those having similar standards at the start of each stage of learning.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 – 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	938
School address:	Netherhall Road Maryport Cumbria
Postcode:	CA15 6NT
Telephone number:	01900 813434
Fax number:	01900 814867
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr K Little
Date of previous inspection:	27 th September 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is a smaller than average mixed comprehensive school with 938 students on roll. There are 416 boys and 426 girls in the main school. The school has a much smaller than average sized sixth form, comprising 40 male and 56 female students. The school has changed a little in terms of size and composition since the last inspection, being larger overall, but with a smaller sixth form. Students come from an area of social and economic disadvantage, which is well below average in terms of socio-economic status. On entry to Year 7, the intake is below average in attainment. The vast majority of students are white and there are no students whose mother tongue is not English who are at an early stage of learning English. Some 24 per cent take up their eligibility for free school meals, which is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs is above average. These students have a wide range of needs including specific learning difficulties, (dyslexia), moderate or severe learning difficulties or social, emotional or behavioural problems. The highest categories of need include students with severe and complex difficulties. There are fewer than average with statements of special needs although the proportion of students with significant needs is higher than this figure suggests. Last year, 14 students joined the school and nine left, other than at the ages of 11 or 16.

The school has specialist Sports College status and recognition as a Full Service Extended School. The school has an Investors In People award, plus Artsmark, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools awards. It is involved in following initiatives; Duke of Edinburgh Award,

Excellence in Cities, Single Regeneration Budget and Young Enterprise. The school is centrally involved in diverse community provision.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
18462	B. Jones	Lead inspector	
9132	J. Godfrey	Lay inspector	
4926	T. Aspin	Team inspector	Mathematics.
15079	A. Boys	Team inspector	Science.
22695	R. Cardinal	Team inspector	Business studies. Work-related learning (WRL). Provision for students with special educational needs.
27803	J. Clark	Team inspector	Religious education.
11508	C. Griffin	Team inspector	English.
2941	A. Henderson	Team inspector	Physical education.
1769	M. Holohan	Team inspector	History
4317	K. Madrell	Team inspector	Geography.
20913	N. McKemey	Team inspector	Art and design.
2079	T. Slack	Team inspector	Design and technology.
15075	B. Stephens	Team inspector	Modern languages. English as an additional language (EAL).
31096	J. Thornhill	Team inspector	Information and communication technology. (ICT).
1340	D. Wigley	Team inspector	Music. Citizenship.

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides an acceptable standard of education but has some serious weaknesses in its work. Leadership is satisfactory but crucial aspects of management, relating to monitoring and evaluating the performance of the school, are unsatisfactory. Teaching, learning and students' achievement are satisfactory overall. However, there is a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching, and both achievement and teaching are unsatisfactory in mathematics. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Overall provision is very good in music and religious education because teaching and learning are very good.
- Results at GCSE have been well below average and reflect under-achievement in recent years; there has been insufficient improvement in results since the previous inspection.
- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in mathematics and students do not achieve as well as they should in the subject.
- There are crucial weaknesses in senior and middle management levels in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and expectations are not high enough.
- The school has very good links with the local and wider community, which it uses very well to enhance students' personal development and to support learning.
- The school takes very good care of its students' welfare, health and safety and specialist support for students' with special educational needs is good.
- There is a very good range of opportunities that enhances the provision for work-related-learning for students aged 14 to 19.
- There is a very good programme of extra-curricular activities, particularly in the performing arts and sport, and many students take part and benefit.

Specific weaknesses noted in the key issues of the last report have been tackled satisfactorily. However, the school has made unsatisfactory improvement since its previous inspection in teaching and standards achieved. The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		All schools			Similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	E	E	E	E
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	D	C	D	

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

Achievement is satisfactory. Results in the as yet unvalidated Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2004 were below average, but average compared to similar schools, reflecting satisfactory achievement. In 2003, results were average and reflected good achievement by this group of

students. The GCSE capped examination results in 2004 were well below average and well below results in similar schools; achievement was unsatisfactory. Standards seen in the inspection are below average in Year 9 and in Year 11. The standards in Year 11 are higher than recent GCSE results, reflecting a higher attaining group, action taken to tackle under-achievement and a more settled staffing situation. Students achieve satisfactorily throughout Years 7 to 11, other than in mathematics where teaching is unsatisfactory. The achievement of students with special educational needs is satisfactory and the highest attaining students achieve well. There are no significant differences in the standards of boys and girls. Standards in the sixth form are average and students achieve well. Standards here are higher than recent examination results. Weaknesses in teaching have mainly been eradicated, but there is still poor achievement in Year 13 in mathematics, where teaching is unsatisfactory.

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Students' attitudes, attendance and behaviour are satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education overall. Teaching is satisfactory throughout the main school. Overall, learning is satisfactory, but there is a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching and learning. The curriculum is good. Pastoral care in the school is very good and the good relationships in the school support personal development well. Students receive satisfactory advice and guidance so that they mainly take appropriate courses. The school has good links with other schools and colleges and very good links with the community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Leadership by the headteacher and key staff at senior and middle management levels is satisfactory overall. However, there are some crucial weaknesses in management concerning the evaluation of the school's performance, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and use of data by heads of subjects departments. Governance is satisfactory overall, but the school does not comply fully in providing an act of collective worship on a daily basis, and there are some omissions in the information provided for parents.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents think this is a good school where children settle well, receive good teaching, make good progress and are encouraged to become more mature. A high proportion of parents is concerned about behaviour and many would like more information about their children's progress. Inspectors found behaviour to be satisfactory overall, and information to parents is good. Students think this is a good school to be at, they have good friends, feel trusted and find it easy to talk to adults if they have a problem, but many are worried about behaviour and bullying. Inspectors found the school's response to any bullying is effective. They enjoy sports, drama, extra-curricular activities and school dinners.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Improve teaching in mathematics and tackle under-achievement in the subject.
- Ensure that the new management structure is used effectively to promote a relentless drive to improve standards by raising expectations of teachers and aspirations of students.

- Ensure a greater consistency in the role and effectiveness of subject heads of department in monitoring and evaluating the work of their departments.

Sixth form

- Improve teaching and learning in mathematics.
- Ensure improved access to computer facilities to help students develop their independent learning skills.
- Ensure a greater consistency in the contribution made by subjects in developing key skills.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship for all students;
- meet all the requirements in providing information to parents.

THE SIXTH FORM AT NETHERHALL SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form shows good effectiveness. It takes in students from a very wide range of prior attainments, and through good teaching and a good curriculum that meets well their needs and aspirations, enables them to achieve well. The sixth form is led well, and supports students well. Overall, the sixth form is cost effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The policy of open access has enabled the school to provide worthwhile courses for students who otherwise may not have progressed into post-16 education.
- Standards are rising and good improvement has been made in this respect since the previous inspection.
- Students receive good teaching and achieve well in general and very well in religious studies, where they receive very good teaching.
- Teaching in mathematics is unsatisfactory and students' achievement is poor in the subject in Year 13.
- Procedures to provide advice and guidance are effective in ensuring good achievement and course completion rates.
- The contribution made by subjects to developing students' key skills lacks consistency.
- Computer facilities are inadequate to support independent learning.

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	English literature good. Standards are above average and students' achievement is good. Teaching is good.
Mathematics	Mathematics unsatisfactory. Standards in Year 13 are well below average and students' achievement is poor. Some students are not taking a suitable course and teaching is unsatisfactory. There is a more positive picture in Year 12, where teaching is having a positive impact.
Science	Physics satisfactory. Standards are below average, but students are achieving as well as they should in response to satisfactory teaching. They are helped by their positive attitudes towards the subject. Sampled work in

Biology showed below average standards, but students are responding to satisfactory teaching and progressing satisfactorily. **Chemistry** in Year 12 was sampled. Standards were below average but teaching and learning were satisfactory, with students attaining the standards that would be expected on the basis of their past results.

Humanities

Religious studies very good. Standards are average, reflecting very good achievement in relation to their starting points. They receive very good teaching. Sampled work in **geography** showed students in Year 12 are progressing well in response to good teaching. Standards are average.

Visual and performing arts
and media

Sampled work in **drama very good.** Very good teaching inspires students, who are making very good progress. Standards in Year 12 are well above average. Sampled work in Year 12 **art and design good.** Students are making good progress and producing above average standards. Teaching is good.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Physical education and sports studies satisfactory. Standards are average and this reflects satisfactory teaching and learning. Students are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their starting points.
Business	Business studies good. Students achieve well in response to good teaching. Standards are above average.

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 school reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Academic support is good, and only on occasion, for example in mathematics, do students take courses that are not suitable for them. Students enjoy good and supportive relationships with staff. Pastoral care is very good. Staff know students well and offer good guidance and advice based on effective monitoring of academic progress and personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership of the sixth form is good. Management is satisfactory. There are sound systems in place to monitor the work of the sixth form, but there are some inconsistencies between subjects in monitoring the effectiveness of teaching. Effective planning has ensured a good curriculum in this open access sixth form, which effectively meets the needs and aspirations of most students.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students regard this as a good sixth form and most enjoy being students here. They feel that teaching is good and staff help them to achieve their best. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a significant number stated that their courses do not suit their ability or career plans, but inspectors found that there is a good range of courses to suit all needs and abilities and flexibility to change in the first term of each year if necessary. A similar number are concerned about relationships between students and the way in which the school is run. A third of students do not feel that an adult in school knows them well and nearly half feel the school does not seek and respond to their views well. During the inspection, inspectors found no students who endorsed these negative views. Students would like, and need better access to computers to help them with their work.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11. Standards are below average in Year 9 and in Year 11. In the sixth form, standards are broadly average, reflecting the open access policy that leads to a wider than average range of attainment; achievement is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well in religious education throughout the school and in music in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards in Year 11 are above average in modern foreign languages, history, art and design and students mainly achieve well in these subjects.
- Standards in mathematics are below average in the main school and students' achievement is unsatisfactory; in Year 13, standards in the subject are well below average and achievement is poor.
- GCSE results are well below average and well below results in similar schools.

Commentary

Main school

1. Results in the 2004 national tests at the end of Year 9 (as yet unvalidated) were below average. When account is taken of their standards on entry, this group of students achieved satisfactorily in each of the core subjects, English, mathematics and science. The trend of improvement in results to 2003 was above the trend nationally; there are no data to judge the trend to 2004, but results for that year were lower overall than in 2003. Compared to similar schools, results in 2004 were average and reflected satisfactory achievement in each of the three subjects. In 2003, results were average and reflected good achievement by this group of students.
2. Overall capped results in the 2004 GCSE examinations (as yet unvalidated) were well below average compared to all schools. Results were well below average compared to schools deemed similar in terms of students' attainment at the end of their Year 9, reflecting significant under-achievement. The trend in results to 2004 was below the trend nationally. Results were well below the targets set.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.7 (34.5)	33.3 (33.4)
Mathematics	33.8 (33.5)	35.5 (35.4)
Science	31.5 (31.7)	33.1 (33.6)

There were 163 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	31 (33)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	74 (76)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	93 (89)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	228.1 [27.1] (27.4)	282.8 [34.9] (34.7)

There were 128 students in the year group. Figures in [] brackets are for the previous method of calculating the average point score. Figures in () brackets are for the previous year.

3. Students join the school with levels of attainment that generally are below average in English, mathematics and science. There are exceptions in individual years, for example, the current Year 9 students entered with average standards in mathematics. In other subjects, standards also vary. For example, in design and technology, music and religious education, standards were well below average.
4. In Year 9, standards are below average overall; this reflects satisfactory achievement. Standards are below average in English, mathematics and science. This group of students achieve satisfactorily in English and science, but their achievement in mathematics is unsatisfactory in relation to their starting points. In Year 9, current standards of work are average in modern foreign languages, history, art and design, physical education and citizenship. This reflects mainly good achievement in these subjects. Standards are below average in design and technology, ICT, geography, music and religious education. This reflects good achievement in design and technology, music and religious education and satisfactory achievement in ICT and geography. Only in mathematics are students under-achieving. Where achievement is good, teaching is good and the quality of teaching is benefiting from the adoption of methods recommended in the national Key Stage 3 strategy. This ensures a greater consistency of approach that helps students to learn more effectively.
5. In the work seen in Year 11, standards are below average. Standards are below average in English, mathematics and science. Students' achievement is satisfactory in English and science; achievement is unsatisfactory in mathematics. Standards are below average in design and technology, ICT, geography and in the core course in physical education. In citizenship and the GCSE course in physical education, standards are average. In modern foreign languages, history, art and design and religious education, standards are above average. Achievement is good in most of these subjects and very good in religious education. When account is taken of students' starting points in Year 10, their achievement is satisfactory in ICT, geography and physical education. These standards reflect an improvement compared to recent GCSE results, which were well below average. This improvement is due to a number of factors. Current Year 11 students entered Year 7 with standards that, while still below average, were higher and nearer to the average than their predecessors. In addition, the school has taken action to reduce the recent pattern of under-achievement and there is a more settled staffing situation. Also, the curriculum has been modified and meets better the needs and aspirations of all students.
6. Standards of literacy are below average. There are more students entering the school with very low standards than in most schools. Higher attainers explain themselves

clearly both orally and in writing, but most students are below average in these skills. Spoken answers in class tend to be short and not expanded and students are not good at using subject-specific vocabulary. Students' standards of numeracy are sufficient to support learning in their other subjects, although overall they are below average in Years 9 and 11. Students do not develop good presentation and mathematical communication skills and work habits. This impedes learning. Mental skills are too low because teachers are insecure in applying the most recent national guidance for students in Years 7 to 9. Students' competency in ICT is average and enables them to use such skills across other subjects in the curriculum. However, the inconsistency in planning for these opportunities means that not all subjects ensure a positive approach and skills are not developed consistently.

7. The higher attaining students and those who are gifted and talented achieve well. In the core subjects in English and science, lesson planning is satisfactory in meeting the needs of these higher attaining students. In mathematics, there is no clear-cut planning to extend and challenge these students. In other subjects, planning varies, but is mainly good, and very good in art and design. Students are also given good additional challenges through extra-curricular work and visits and courses outside school that extend their experience and help to raise their aspirations. The achievement of students with special needs is satisfactory and in line with their peers. There are many examples of good and very good achievement, including gains in social skills as well as in learning. In 2004, students with special needs gained an average of between three and four GCSE passes with a third gaining an average of five or more passes. This represents satisfactory achievement for these students. The great majority of Year 7 students following paired reading programmes make at least satisfactory progress in their reading. In a recent four-month programme, a third of the students involved made gains of at least eight months in test scores. There are no students at an early stage of English language acquisition, and students who come from ethnic minority groupings achieve satisfactorily, in line with their peers.
8. Variations in the standards achieved in different subjects by boys and girls in national tests in Year 9 do not follow a consistent pattern. On average, over recent years, the differences have not been significant. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, the results obtained by both boys and girls were well below average, although girls' results were relatively better than boys' results. Taken over the past four years, the difference between boys' and girls' results is similar to that found nationally. The gap between boys' and girls' results has narrowed, partly as a result of a relative decline in the performance of girls.

Sixth form

9. Attainment on entry to the sixth form varies considerably. Overall, the attainment on entry to Year 12 is lower than normally found in sixth forms because the school operates an open access system to encourage students of all levels of attainment to benefit from continuing education. In 2004, results overall were below average, but this reflected satisfactory achievement overall when account is taken of the students' attainment at the start of their courses. Female students did not do as well as male students and the gap was wider than the gap found nationally. Male students' results were broadly average, while female students' results were well below average.

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

	School results	National results
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Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	91.6 (94.3)	92.4 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	20.0 (33.3)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	197.4 (251.5)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 31 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

10. In the work seen in the inspection, standards seen in the subjects focused on are mainly average and this represents good improvement since the previous inspection. Observed standards are broadly in line with recent examination results, which have varied between average and below average. Work seen showed that standards are rising and students are achieving well overall. Sixth form students with special educational needs achieve well in a demanding range and combination of courses.
11. During the inspection, work was seen in detail in six subjects and was sampled in a number of others. In Year 13, in English literature and in business studies, standards are above average and students achieve well. Standards are broadly average in religious education, but students achieve very well in relation to their starting points in response to the very good teaching they receive. Standards are broadly average in physical education and in physics. In both subjects, students achieve satisfactorily in relation to their starting points. In mathematics, standards are well below average. A number of students started this course with a background in the subject that was not suitable for A-level study. This, combined with unsatisfactory teaching, leads to poor achievement in the subject. There is a similar pattern to achievement in these subjects in Year 12. However, standards in mathematics are higher and are broadly average. The teaching is better and students are achieving satisfactorily because of the positive impact of new leadership.
12. Standards of communication and the use of ICT are broadly average in the focused subjects. Standards in the application of number are below average. Only in business education were the standards for each skill consistently above average. Mixed outcomes were more apparent. For example, in religious education the development of communication skills is an integral part of the learning process and students achieve well. However, there is not enough focus on the development of ICT skills. ICT development is also limited in physical education and mathematics. Communication skills are below average in physics. There is no clear policy for the development of numeracy skills for post-16 students. There is some good well-planned practice, for example in business studies, where real and relevant data are used to give students an understanding of financial management. In subjects such as A-level physics, skills are sufficient to support students' learning. In mathematics however, learning is sometimes impeded by a lack of understanding of basic algebra. In subjects that were focused on during the inspection, standards of numeracy are sufficient to support learning. The exception was in mathematics itself, where some students in Year 13 do not have the basic skills necessary to cope with the course. There are good opportunities for the development of a broader range of key skills such as working together and problem solving in the enrichment opportunities offered by the Young Enterprise scheme, the Duke of Edinburgh award and sports leadership programmes. There is no specific requirement for key skills to be planned within subjects. Although key personnel such as the head of sixth form are able to observe the impact of key skills development when discussing work with students, there is no systematic overall monitoring and evaluating of key skills across all post-16 subjects. Consequently the school is not clear about the strengths and weaknesses in different subject areas and development requirements.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes to work and behaviour are satisfactory. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Where teaching is good, students have good attitudes and achieve well because they are motivated and managed well.
- Relationships across the school are good and supportive.
- There is too much low level disruption in lessons where there is insufficient challenge.
- Fixed term exclusions have increased since the previous inspection and are high.
- Attendance in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory and has an adverse affect on the achievement of some students.

Commentary

Main school

13. Students have satisfactory attitudes to learning. When teaching is good, expectations high and lessons challenging, students are usually well motivated and enjoy learning. They respond positively to teachers' questions and concentrate well. Students enjoy practical lessons such as physical education, music, art and design and drama, and also have good attitudes in history and religious education. However, they find a significant number of lessons less interesting and here they are quiet, passive and have no enthusiasm for learning. They lose attention easily, work slowly and do not complete their tasks. Students work well together in pairs and groups. They enjoy extra sport, music and drama activities and raising money for good causes. Most students feel trusted in school and respond appropriately. Most are also polite to visitors, but many do not adhere to the keep left system in corridors or have the good manners to stand back and let others go first.

Ethnic background of students

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
Chinese

Exclusions in the last school year

No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
937	166	2
1	0	0

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

14. Standards of behaviour are satisfactory but have declined since the previous inspection. Behaviour is good in lessons where students are managed well and motivated, but in many lessons, even where the learning is satisfactory overall, there is often low-level disruption. Students are inclined to shout out their answers rather than follow classroom rules and raise their hands to gain the teacher's attention. Unsatisfactory behaviour was found to be linked with unsatisfactory teaching, poor classroom management and inconsistent use of discipline. Some students stated that staff do not treat them fairly and with respect. Inspectors found that teachers showed students respect, but there were some inconsistencies in the use of disciplinary measures. Behaviour around the school and at break times is satisfactory. Most students use the litter bins provided and there is little vandalism or graffiti.
15. Fixed term exclusions are high and have increased significantly since the previous inspection. There were two permanent exclusions last year. Exclusions are most often

for aggressive behaviour or abusive language. A small number of students who are excluded more than once account for the vast majority of exclusions. Most exclusions are for a single day and the majority are boys, as is the national pattern.

16. Many students expressed concerns about bullying. The school works hard to promote good relationships and to prevent bullying and this results in good relationships across the school. Awareness of bullying is high but students do not always report it. When they do, the school has good strategies for dealing with it and students are usually satisfied with the outcomes. Students work well in mixed groups although boys and girls usually choose to work with their own gender. Students in Year 7 appreciate the support they receive from those in Year 8 when they arrive and this helps them to settle well in school. Younger students also like the support of sixth formers for paired reading to help them improve their reading skills.
17. Students' spiritual development is satisfactory overall, and aspects are addressed well within some subject areas. Students understand the beliefs and values of faith communities, including Christianity and Buddhism, mainly through the work of the religious education department. Through the history department, students have visited the Belgian World War I battlefields and learnt about Auschwitz, both giving them rich spiritual experiences. There is a whole-year plan for collective worship, though assemblies often do not sufficiently focus upon spiritual aspects. Emphasis on spiritual thought is often unsatisfactory in tutorial periods.
18. The provision for students' moral development is satisfactory overall. Subject areas address aspects well. Within English, students consider the moral issues of capital punishment. Through the drama department, a visiting theatre group raised moral racial matters through a production of "Ali comes to Cumbria." The art and design and music departments are emphatic about students taking care of the specialist resources in their areas and this contributes well to their moral development.
19. The social development of students is good, and is encouraged through the active citizenship programme run through the guidance department. Large numbers of students take responsibility for activities within both the school and local communities. They can take Junior Sports Leadership roles through the physical education department and are very involved in supporting bodies such as Christian Aid and Amnesty International. Participation in public performances through the music and drama departments increases students' social awareness. Visits abroad, such as the recent attendance at a religious education conference in New York by members of the sixth form, enable students to become more independent.
20. Students' cultural development is good. They experience the cultures of Africa and Asia by studying the art forms of those continents in music and art and design, and by composing and creating in similar styles. Multicultural comparisons are made through the modern foreign languages department. A multicultural Year 8 arts day was held last year to good effect in raising students' awareness of living in a multi-cultural society. Religions of other cultures are studied in religious education, but there are insufficient opportunities to make visits to mosques or temples to support these studies.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
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School data	8.2
National data	6.9

School data	0.6
National data	1.1

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

21. Attendance remains similar to the previous inspection and is satisfactory. Attendance in Year 7 is good, but in Years 10 and 11 it is unsatisfactory and this has an adverse impact on students' academic performance. Holidays account for much of the absence in September. Most parents appreciate the need for good attendance. Unauthorised absence is similar to national levels. Registration procedures are sound, although the use of registration time to enhance students' learning and personal development is variable and often unsatisfactory. Punctuality is satisfactory. A few students are late for school each morning and there are often a few stragglers to lessons.
22. There are satisfactory systems to monitor attendance to school and individual lessons. The school has recently appointed an attendance officer and introduced a variety of new strategies to try to improve attendance, but the impact of these has not yet been analysed. The work of the governing body attendance panel has improved the attendance and punctuality of a small number of students. The school believes that telephone calls on the first day of absence and the provision of courses in work-related learning have helped to improve attendance, but has not yet evaluated the impact of these strategies. There is good support from the educational welfare officer for improving attendance. Internal truancy is monitored satisfactorily through electronic registration in each lesson, but this is not conducted by all staff as a matter of routine.

Sixth form

23. Students in the sixth form have good attitudes to learning. Most apply themselves well to work and are keen to learn, although many are quiet and passive in lessons. Relationships between students are good and they support each other well. Behaviour is good. Most students understand the importance of being in school and in lessons, and attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. However, a significant number miss registration each morning.
24. Overall, the school makes a good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of sixth form students. Students are keen to take on responsibilities and they are good ambassadors for the school on outside visits. They have their own committee, which has an input on school issues and helps to organise charitable events, and the head boy and girl attend meetings of the governing body. They are pleased to accept a wide variety of responsibilities such as working with children in local primary schools and they provide good role models within the school. There is good participation in the Young Enterprise Award scheme, the annual dramatic production and in sporting activities. The general studies course enables students to develop their spiritual awareness through discussions on beliefs and values and they are encouraged to further their cultural development through the extra-curricular activities provided by subject departments.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a satisfactory education. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, but too variable. The curriculum is good. Pastoral care is very good. The school has satisfactory links with parents. There are good links with other schools and colleges and very good links with the community.

Teaching and learning

Teaching is satisfactory overall in the main school and good in the sixth form. Students' positive approach to their work in the sixth form and their good attitudes are significant in the good learning that takes place. Learning is satisfactory in the main school. The assessment of students' work is satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Much of the teaching in religious education and music is very good and students learn very effectively because teachers have high expectations regarding behaviour and the quality of students' work.
- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in mathematics.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers use the national Key Stage 3 strategy effectively in their planning to give a clear structure to progression within lessons.
- Teaching overall is good in the sixth form and students achieve well.
- A lack of planning means that students do not develop their ICT skills consistently through other subjects and the development of individual study skills in the sixth form is inhibited by the lack of computers.
- There is too much unsatisfactory behaviour in classes throughout Years 7 to 11 that is not tackled effectively and has an adverse effect upon learning.
- In Years 10 and 11, there is too much unchallenging teaching where expectations are too low and students do not make enough progress.
- Assessment procedures and practice, including marking, are inconsistent across subjects and within subjects and there is no common approach to target setting.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 148 lessons.

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1%)	23 (15%)	66 (44%)	47 (32%)	10 (7%)	1 (1%)	0

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

Main school

25. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. In the work seen in the main school, less than average amounts of good and very good teaching take place, there is very little excellent teaching and there is a significant proportion that is unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning have not improved since the previous inspection and there is more unsatisfactory teaching. This is largely because management systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school are unsatisfactory. There is some good practice where heads of department undertake regular and systematic procedures to ensure quality, but in many departments, the process is not rigorous enough and does little to augment the performance management process. As a result, opportunities are missed to spread some of the very good teaching practice that exists in the school. In addition, unsatisfactory teaching is not identified clearly enough or tackled effectively.
26. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is satisfactory overall. It is satisfactory in English and science; in mathematics, it is unsatisfactory. It is very good in music, good in design and technology, modern foreign languages, history, art and design, physical education and religious education. In all other subjects, it is satisfactory. Much work has been undertaken to develop the approach recommended in the national Key Stage 3 strategy. Where this has had an impact, teaching has benefited. For example, lessons in religious education are characterised by very clear structures and planned effectively to meet the needs of all students in the classes. These qualities, allied to consistently high expectations, result in effective teaching where students learn well and their achievement is good. In music, very effective teaching engages students, ensuring that they enjoy a variety of approaches that help them to concentrate and take some responsibility for their own learning. The teachers maintain high expectations regarding students' behaviour, commitment and quality of work and students almost invariably respond positively. They achieve well as a result, making good progress from a low starting point in terms of their attainment on joining the school.
27. Teaching is satisfactory overall in Years 10 and 11. The same pattern exists and teaching is satisfactory in English and science, but unsatisfactory in mathematics. In the main, the same subjects produce good and satisfactory teaching as in Years 7 to 9. Teaching is very good in religious education where the subject benefits from earlier good teaching that encourages success and a keenness to opt for the subject in Year 10. The good practice established by the use of the Key Stage 3 strategy has been extended into Years 10 and 11. Where teaching is good, learning benefits from a common and established approach that engages students from the start of the lesson, then builds on this to introduce new work and/or reinforce and consolidate known work. Where teachers use this approach most effectively, they check on students' progress by involving them in establishing and meeting lesson objectives. Where teaching is good or better, students are clearly focused on achieving the best they can in their GCSE examinations and teachers use this to challenge and stretch them and ensure that good learning takes place. As a result, classrooms are characterised by an atmosphere where achievement is valued, students want to learn and behaviour is good. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, lessons are characterised by a slower pace to learning. Most often, teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are set too low and students are not challenged to the same degree as they are where teaching is good.
28. The great majority of teaching is undertaken by teachers who are specialists in their subjects and have a good knowledge and understanding of the demands of teaching in their area. They plan effectively to help students acquire the skills, knowledge and understanding relating to their particular subjects. Where students learn most

effectively, teachers are good at making them use the technical language of their subject, particularly in question and answer sessions and at the beginning of lessons, where good starter activities are used to engage students. In the best teaching, planning takes good account of the differing needs of students in the same class so that the highest attainers are stretched and challenged and lower attaining students too are working at tasks appropriate to their level. Teachers engender good relationships between students building, on their own positive relationships with their students.

29. In many lessons throughout Years 7 to 11, even where learning is satisfactory overall, behaviour is close to the boundary of acceptability and teachers often have to work hard to overcome low-level distractions in behaviour and noise levels. Often, the way teachers cope with this determines whether students' learning is good or satisfactory. Where teachers' expectations are set and maintained at a high level, students respond well, but teaching quality in general is adversely affected by a lack of consistency in approach.
30. Where teaching is unsatisfactory or poor, this most often occurs where teaching is undertaken by non-specialists or by temporary teachers. Characteristically, their lack of assuredness, lack of depth in their knowledge and understanding of teaching in subjects outside their specialisms, or lack of knowledge of the students lead to unsatisfactory learning. In these classes students are often bored and unmotivated. The same students who behave well in other lessons behave badly and prevent others from learning. In these situations, teachers' use of the school's procedures for managing inappropriate behaviour is not effective. Where the school's senior managers have knowledge of weak teaching they add support, but they are not helped by the lack of consistency in monitoring teaching quality by heads of subject departments.
31. Arrangements to meet the learning needs of all students are satisfactory. Teachers are fully committed to including all groups of students, including those with disabilities or learning difficulties. Measures to ensure equality of opportunity are good. For example, teachers' planning is mostly suited to the differing needs of students so that gifted and talented students are stretched and challenged appropriately.
32. Teaching of students with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Activities are matched appropriately to students' needs. Testing is used well in planning provision. The effective management of students that produces a positive rapport in the learning environment lacks consistency. Similarly, methods that show students how to improve and enable them to work independently also vary in their effectiveness. Support staff are used well in a variety of roles. They make a very effective contribution to students' learning. Specialist teaching and support are very effective in terms of their impact on individual students with significant needs, including very low self-esteem, poor literacy skills, difficulties in managing behaviour and difficulties in coping with stress.
33. The arrangements for teaching literacy are satisfactory overall. This includes some good practice where specific attention to literacy development as an integral part of the teaching and learning process leads to above average outcomes. However, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching of literacy skills and the impact on learning have not been systematic enough. The school has started to raise all teachers' awareness of the different strategies used to teach numeracy skills, but the planned development of numeracy skills by subjects is unsatisfactory overall. Sound use is made of numeracy skills in other subjects, but there is not enough consistency in the manner in which all subjects identify numeracy in planning and devise strategies to improve students' numeracy skills. The teaching of ICT through subjects across the curriculum

is unsatisfactory overall. While there is some good teaching in some areas such as history, religious education and physical education, this is not the case throughout the curriculum. The combination of unsatisfactory resources and a lack of cohesion in the planning for teaching ICT skills mean that students do not experience a consistent approach and miss opportunities to develop their ICT skills in other subjects.

34. Assessment procedures and practice, including marking, are satisfactory, but there are inconsistencies in aspects of assessment across departments and within the majority of subjects. Basic data related to examination results is collated and available for teachers. Subject leaders do not always understand how to use the comparative data available and do not always understand how to set realistic but challenging targets for students. Insufficiently consistent use is made of individual target or group target setting, other than giving students target examination grades for Years 9 and 11. Marking and day-to-day assessment are also inconsistent. In subjects such as art and design and religious education, assessment is thorough and constructive, is embedded in planning and is used to help students improve. In drama, students are given precise written targets, and are shown exactly what they need to do to reach the next level set by the teacher. In some subjects such as mathematics and ICT there is a lack of real diagnostic marking that is used to inform planning or help students improve; therefore students do not know how to reach a higher standard in their examinations.

Sixth form

35. The quality of teaching and learning is good in the sixth form. In the six subjects inspected in detail, there is some variability and students' achievement is closely linked to the quality of teaching they receive. In mathematics, for example, teaching is unsatisfactory and the level of students' achievement and recent results reflect this. Within the same subject, changes in teaching in Year 12 have resulted in students achieving well and attaining higher standards. In physics and in physical education, teaching is satisfactory and students are achieving satisfactorily. Teaching is good in business studies and English literature and very good in religious education, and this is closely reflected in the results and the value added in these subjects.
36. In general, teachers' depth of subject knowledge and their good understanding of the examination demands of their areas lead to effective teaching. They prepare students well and students appreciate teachers' expertise, their helpfulness in assessing their progress and their easy access to support when they need it outside lesson time. The good qualities in the teaching in the main school that lead to effective learning and good achievement are also found in the sixth form because many teachers include both the main school and the sixth form in their teaching schedule. Students bring a higher level of maturity to their work and a keenness to do well so that attitudes and behaviour are positive qualities to be capitalised on rather than barriers to learning found in many classes in the main school. As a result, lessons are characterised by a shared commitment to hard work and good cooperation between students that results in a positive working atmosphere where learning is valued.
37. The assessment of students' work, record keeping and the use of assessment to plan work or to show students how to improve are satisfactory, but there are some inconsistencies across and within departments. Examination targets are realistically based on GCSE grades. Achievement related to target grades varies, and is exceeded in religious education and missed by a long way in mathematics. There is some very effective, thorough and constructive assessment, for example in an English group, where specific assessment criteria are used to reinforce strengths and set individual improvement targets. In contrast, there is unsatisfactory practice in mathematics where there are insufficient records maintained of ongoing progress in learning. Also in

mathematics and physical education there is insufficient diagnostic marking or guidance given to help students improve. The use of a commercial package to analyse A-level results is starting to have an impact in helping the school monitor progress and evaluate initiatives taken to improve standards.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good and ensures progression by catering well for the different needs and aspirations of the student body. Opportunities for enrichment of learning through extra-curricular activities are very good. The provision of staffing, accommodation and learning resources is satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership of the curriculum is very innovative, especially with regard to developing vocational courses.
- The overall breadth of opportunities is good and the range and number of courses meet well the needs of the learners in the 14 to 19 age ranges.
- There is a very good range of enrichment opportunities, particularly in sport, recreation, music and drama.
- The quality of careers development is good.
- The provision for students with special educational needs is good.
- The school has satisfactory levels of book and computer provision overall, but the number of books in the library resource is too low for a school this size and there are not enough computers in the sixth form.

Commentary

Main school

38. The school's curriculum provision is good. The curriculum meets all statutory requirements except for the provision of a daily act of collective worship. Current emphases on national intervention strategies such as the Key Stage 3 strategy and the requirements on the college as a specialist college are beginning to have a positive impact on teaching and learning. In addition, the leadership has been innovative in the manner it has approached curricular planning so that it best meets the needs and aspirations of all students. Departments plan their curriculum well. Innovative thinking is leading to a curriculum for Years 10 and 11 that suits the needs of differing groups of students.
39. During Years 7 to 9 all students have access to the full range of subjects of the National Curriculum. There are additional elements in the form of drama; dance; outdoor education and thinking skills. Some students in Year 9 have the opportunity for work-related learning. Students take either French or German, with higher attaining students taking both languages during Years 8 and 9. The time allocated to physical education is above that found in most schools and in keeping with the school's designated Sports College status. Students commence a core double award GCSE in ICT during Year 9, although the school will need to evaluate the appropriateness of this for all students.

40. During Years 10 and 11 students follow a good range of GCSE and vocationally accredited courses. The above average allocation of physical education time for all students continues. All Year 10 students are taking citizenship to GCSE level and either a short course in GCSE physical education or the Junior Sports Leadership Award. All students take half courses in religious education and ICT to GCSE. The school has introduced different pathways of courses for students to follow so they can have experiences that better suit their abilities and aptitudes. It is clearly taking advantage of the opportunities provided by increased flexibility in curriculum planning for this age group. So, some students take full GCSE double science whereas others take the GCSE applied science course. There are also vocational courses in ICT; child care; engineering; job seeking skills; retail; catering; and work-related learning.
41. There is a very good range of enrichment opportunities. As befits a school with a specialist Sports College designation, there is a very good range of opportunities in both competitive and recreational sport. Monitoring data provided by the school show that participation rates among students are very good. Provision for the arts is good: it is excellent in music and very good in drama. There are some unique features such as the cheerleaders group, about to set off for an international meeting in Florida. The range of educational visits is extensive and again, the monitoring data show that these events are supported well. Many are sports-based but they also include the arts, curriculum-based visits for science, geography, history and careers. Subjects provide additional opportunities for study before and after school, including a “breakfast” French course. In religious education, visits to places connected with other faiths are fewer than often found.
42. Careers education is good. It is taught within the guidance course by a specialist team and is well supported by Connexions. Year 10 students value a week of work experience where placements are well organised, monitored and evaluated. The school’s very good community links ensure that a wide range of suitable work experience opportunities is available. All individuals in Year 11 have personal interviews to help them decide their future and objective and unbiased advice is given. The careers library is well stocked and useful.
43. Curricular programmes ensure equality of opportunity and there are no students for whom the National Curriculum is disapplied. Effective steps have been taken to match the curriculum to students’ needs, for example through the wide range of vocational courses on offer. Extra study programmes have been offered to students in Years 10 and 11 who are found to be under-achieving, in order to raise their attainment. Incidents of a racist nature are very rare because the curriculum includes programmes to enhance the students’ understanding of life in a multi-cultural society.
44. Provision for special needs is good. There is a wide range of intervention programmes to support specific needs plus a high level of support for specific groups. There are clear strategies to ensure that all students access the curriculum and at the same time ensure that there is targeted specialist support for individuals. This support is pro-active with adjustments made when concerns are raised. There are high levels of support for students in the designated “platinum” group who have significant needs. Similarly the school’s Improvement Centre is very well resourced to enable it to provide wide-ranging support to individuals and groups throughout the week. The very good use of specialist support including learning mentors, school counsellors and behaviour support teachers enhances the impact of specialist provision overall. The creation of designated “gold” groups in different curriculum areas supports subject planning to meet needs and provides clear criteria for prioritising the deployment of support staff.

The wide range of courses and accreditation in Years 10 and 11 gives students a variety of opportunities to achieve. The central location of accommodation is an important feature of provision. Students naturally congregate there with staff at breaks and lunchtimes and this fulfils a key role in terms of both academic and pastoral support.

45. Accommodation is satisfactory. There are sufficient classrooms and technical rooms for all subjects and some are spacious and well decorated. Art and design, design and technology and music have good accommodation. Other subjects generally have suites of rooms so staff can co-ordinate their teaching. The general attractiveness of rooms creates a good working environment for learning. In many rooms, good displays support the learning, but public areas are not always used to best advantage to display students' work. The building is clean and all public areas have recently been redecorated. There is a programme to re-decorate teaching areas.
46. Overall, the match of teachers and their subject qualifications to the curriculum is satisfactory. There is a small proportion of second-subject and non-specialist teaching that adversely affects the quality of learning and the standards achieved by students. The school does not always attract sufficient high quality applicants for posts, and the governors and the headteacher have recently had difficulty in recruiting staff for mathematics and science. The match of learning support staff to assist the delivery of the curriculum for students with special educational needs is good. The library and technical staff undertake a valuable role in assisting and supporting the teaching of the curriculum. The secretarial and site management staff make a significant contribution to the smooth day-to-day running of the school.
47. Resources for learning are satisfactory. The overall provision to support teaching and learning in ICT lessons is satisfactory, but the range and availability of equipment in subject departments are variable and this inhibits the contribution ICT can make to the students' learning through other subjects. The library is well organised and managed and it is used well by students from all year groups. However, the number of books available is well below average.

Sixth form

48. Sixth form provision is good. There is a good range of opportunities, although numbers on some individual courses are small. Opportunities have expanded since the previous inspection. In addition to a good range of AS and A-level courses that includes psychology, three separate sciences, religious education and physical education, the school offers vocationally accredited courses at advanced and intermediate level. These include advanced media, health and social care, leisure and recreation and performing arts. At intermediate level there are courses in childcare and leisure and tourism. There are also one-year courses in BTEC sport first diploma, the sports leadership certificate, and an ICT course leading to the European Community Driving Licence. All students take general studies during Year 12 and the statutory requirement for the provision of religious education in the sixth form is met. There are also opportunities to take GCSE courses in mathematics, science, English and geography.
49. There are good enrichment opportunities in the sixth form. Students participate in a range of activities such as Young Enterprise, the Duke of Edinburgh award, representative and recreational sport, paired reading with younger students, drama, choir and other performing arts, millennium volunteers and a range of charity events.

All take general studies in Year 12 during which they encounter a good range of issues related to citizenship, ethics and other contemporary concerns.

50. There is a good match between the number, qualifications and experience of teachers and the needs of the curriculum. Accommodation for post-16 students is satisfactory. Resources are satisfactory, except that there are not enough computers. The flexibility and positive approaches of both staff and students help to minimise the problem, but this is a barrier to developing students' independent learning skills.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes very good care of students' welfare, health and safety. The advice and guidance based on monitoring are satisfactory. The school canvasses students' views and involves them in its work satisfactorily.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Health and safety and procedures are very good.
- Pastoral care is very good and vulnerable students are very well supported.
- Induction arrangements for new students are good.
- Students' personal development is tracked well, but not tied in closely enough with assessment to provide good guidance and support for academic achievement in the main school.
- Students receive good and impartial advice on further study and career opportunities.

Commentary

Main school

51. Procedures for dealing with students' welfare, health and safety and for child protection issues are very good. This is a strength of the school. Good attention is given to managing risks around the school and for visits outside school. First aid procedures are good and a good number of staff have first aid qualifications, including the site managers. Internet service provision is safe and secure. Traffic flow on the site continues to be an unresolved hazard, but traffic flow outside the school has been improved. It is unsatisfactory that the girls' changing rooms have no toilets. The canteen offers a good choice of healthy foods throughout the day including breakfast time. Students are consulted on canteen arrangements and they have a good awareness of their dietary needs.
52. Pastoral care is very good, enabling students to feel comfortable in a secure and supportive environment. Induction arrangements are good and aided by the good links with local primary schools. Students settle well in school. Most form tutors know students well and monitor students' personal development very closely. One-to-one tutorials with students, which are sometimes attended by parents, are supportive and helpful in setting goals, but targets are not tied in closely enough with accurate academic assessments. Each student has an individual education plan to help them monitor their own progress and personal development, but students are unaware of their attainment levels in most subjects. Registration procedures are effective, but the use of registration time is variable and although the school provides daily guidance to discuss the theme for the week, this is not always used effectively to promote students' learning and personal development.

53. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are tracked very well and parents are kept well informed whenever there is a problem. There are good procedures for dealing with exclusions and parents are involved well. The school monitors and deals with incidents of bullying effectively. Teachers' awareness of bullying has a high profile in school but students do not always report it. Students have trusting relationships with at least one adult in school.
54. The school has very good links with outside support agencies, which meet regularly through an inclusion panel and help to support vulnerable students very well to improve attendance and behaviour. The Support Learning Unit team includes a counsellor and takes very good care of students with special educational needs, which has a good impact on their learning and achievement. A key feature of this support is a weekly multi-agency meeting that reviews the needs of individual students. This procedure is very effective in ensuring that maximum use is made of school resources to support individuals causing concern and that full use is made of specialist support from health professionals and other support services. Support for individuals is very effective in ensuring that students with very significant needs thrive within the school environment. Review procedures are very thorough and the most vulnerable students are kept under constant review.
55. There is a satisfactory programme of guidance, which is planned well to guide students through school choices and prepares them well for life after school. Advice is based on very good tracking of personal development and individuals are usually guided onto the appropriate courses for their needs and abilities. However, it is not tied closely enough to academic attainment. The careers programme is good and supported well by the Connexions service. There is a good careers library. Advice on the option choices for Year 10 is good and the "Courses for You" pack is helpful. Students in Year 10 value a week of very useful and well organised work experience. Extended work experience placements and work-related learning are provided for some students, who benefit from less academic courses in terms of confidence, attendance and achievement. Students have good and unbiased advice on post-16 options, including provision outside the school.
56. Students' views are regularly sought through the one-to-one tutorials and the school council. Students help to set their own personal targets for improvement and this has a good impact on their learning and achievement. Students' views have been canvassed on changes in the school uniform and canteen provision and the school has acted on them. A group of students meets regularly with canteen staff and they contributed to the decision to limit the servings of chips. The majority of students feel the school is interested in their views.

Sixth form

57. The school takes very good care of the welfare, health and safety of students in the sixth form. The head of sixth form and team of tutors have good and supportive relationships with students.
58. A high proportion of students stated on the questionnaire that there was not an adult in school who knew them well, but this was not borne out in the inspection. Students are pleased with the guidance they had on entry to the sixth form and most feel the courses they are following suit their needs and aspirations. Support and guidance in the sixth form is based on good tracking of academic progress and personal development. Where they are good, for example in religious studies, students find assessment helpful so they know how to improve their work. Targets for improvement

are regularly updated to help students achieve well. Students find teachers accessible and helpful, but would like access to more computers in their study areas. Registration procedures are effective, but the time is not used effectively to promote students' learning and personal development. Some students do not value it enough to attend. There is no formal guidance programme, but all students attend general studies lessons that give them a good understanding of the wider world. Careers advice is well informed and there is good support for university applications. The "Aim Higher" coordinator is successfully raising self-esteem and increasing confidence so that some students with no family history of higher education are aiming to go to university.

59. The school takes satisfactory account of students' views, although a high proportion of students stated in the inspection questionnaire that the school does not seek or respond to their views. Students have an opportunity to air their views and influence school development through the sixth form and school councils. They act as officers on the school council and set the agenda, which has covered changes in school uniform, toilets and canteen provision.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good links with primary schools help transition to secondary school.
- Very good community links ensure strong support for the school's specialist Sports College status.
- The very good links with the local and wider community extend students' experiences and enhance learning, especially in sport.
- Planners are not used well enough to communicate with parents.

Commentary

Main school

60. The school has satisfactory links with parents to enable them to support students' education. Parents consider that good teaching, coupled with high expectations, enables their children to make good progress. Inspectors found that teaching in the main school is satisfactory and students' achievement is satisfactory. A significant number of parents expressed concerns about behaviour; inspectors found behaviour to be satisfactory overall, although low-level disruption occurs too often in lessons and distracts from good learning. Parents are very pleased with the arrangements for settling into school and the way their children are helped to become more mature.
61. The school values its links with parents and provides good and useful information to them in a weekly newsletter. The governing body's annual report to parents and prospectus are satisfactory, but do not contain information on the arrangements for taking disabled students into the school; steps the school has taken to ensure disabled students are treated on equal terms with other students; facilities provided to help access to the school for disabled students; nor on the destinations of school leavers. There is no information on the implementation of the governing body's policy for students with special educational needs. Students' planners are not used consistently or well to communicate with parents. The vast majority of parents support their

children's learning well at home by providing computers and Internet access, but there is not yet a website for parents to access information about the school.

62. A significant number of parents do not feel well informed about their children's progress, but inspectors found that the school provides good information on students' progress through reports and through parental consultation meetings. Parents are invited to one-to-one tutorials to discuss their children's progress and set targets for improvement, but are not always encouraged sufficiently to attend. Those that do, find them useful in supporting their child's learning and personal development. Parental consultation meetings are well attended. The school is quick to contact parents when there is a problem and involves them in helping to overcome difficulties. Parents' views are sought through articles in the newsletter and occasionally formally by letter, as was the case in the bid for specialist Sports College status. The school sometimes has difficulty in recruiting parent governors and elections are rare. The Friends and Supporters of Netherhall Association is a small but dedicated group who support fund-raising and parents' meetings well. They recently organised a function to raise money to help send the school's cheerleaders group to Florida. Parents are helpful in providing work experience placements for some students. The complaints procedure is sound.
63. In providing for students with special educational needs, community links are very good with support services used very effectively. Links with feeder schools are very good, including use made of information about students' needs to plan provision and the organisation of enhanced transition programmes for students with the most significant needs. Links with parents are satisfactory. Informal links are better than formal links.
64. The very good links with the local and wider community enhance students' learning, achievement and personal development and are a strength of the school. A wide range of visits and visitors broaden students' knowledge and social development very effectively, for example a visit from Ugandan writers. There is a very good range of residential and day trips abroad and at home, for example trips to the battlefields of France, visits to Keswick and the ski areas of Scotland. Students support local and national charities such as the tsunami appeal, Red Nose Day and Christmas Cheers very well. The school has very productive links with the Cumbrian Business Education Consortium and a very good range of useful work experience placements is found locally for students in Years 10 and on vocational courses. Very good support and sponsorship were found from local business and industry for the school's specialist Sports College status. The school has very good links with local sports clubs and associations through its specialist status and sports action zone to support the development of sport in the community. Members of the community make very good use of the college's facilities to promote lifelong learning and continuing professional development. There are very good links with support networks such as Youth Outreach, the educational welfare service, Connexions and the police to support vulnerable students and personal development.
65. The school has good links with other schools and colleges that make a significant contribution to achievement and personal development. Specialist Sports College status has resulted in strong sporting links with primary and secondary schools and has improved students' sporting skills. The school is the hub centre for the Allerdale School Sports Coordinator Partnership and employs a full time partnership development manager. There is a very good range of sporting fixtures with other schools to enhance students' sporting, social and moral development. Good links with

primary schools are successful in easing transition from Year 6 to Year 7. Several students do work experience in primary schools. The school works closely with local colleges to provide alternative courses and improve choices in Years 10 and 11. Links with other secondary schools are improving to provide a wider range of post-16 choices within the community. There are good links with universities to raise students' aspirations.

Sixth form

66. The school maintains satisfactory links with the parents of students in the sixth form and provides them with good information about progress. A partner scheme with a local university encourages students to "Aim Higher". The very strong links with the community continue to enhance students' experiences in the sixth form. The good links with primary schools provide useful work experience placements for students following the health and social care course, and good business links help students of business studies. Very good use is made of the local and wider community to enhance learning through day trips and residential visits. Students are very active within the community, for example through Young Enterprise, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and in helping younger students.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Leadership by the headteacher and key staff is satisfactory. Management has some crucial weaknesses and is unsatisfactory overall. Governance is satisfactory, though statutory requirements are not met for collective worship and in the provision of some information to parents.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership has been very successful in gaining specialist college status in order to give an impetus to raising standards.
- Leadership of the curriculum is a strength and ensures that all students are included and well integrated into school life.
- The sixth form is led well and ensures open access for those students wishing to continue their education after the age of 16.
- Strategic planning and systems for improvement are not well embedded, and subject leadership is inconsistent.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by heads of subjects are unsatisfactory.
- Data about the school's performance are not used well enough to inform teachers in order to raise their expectations regarding students' achievement.
- Governors are very active and supportive but do not challenge senior management enough in order to ensure a relentless drive to improve standards.
- While there is some good practice in the teaching of key skills in the sixth form, the contributions made by individual subjects are not monitored and evaluated closely enough.

Commentary

Main school

67. Leadership is satisfactory overall. The headteacher, governors and the senior leadership team share a clear and ambitious vision for the school's development, at the heart of which is a determination to provide as many opportunities as possible for students to achieve. This vision pays close attention to the needs of students as individuals, many of whom join the school with very low standards of attainment. It recognises the need to provide support and raise aspirations both for students and the local community, and to ensure that all students are valued and offered opportunities to achieve, regardless of their aptitudes and capabilities. There is a growing confidence that is having a positive impact throughout the school and across the local community. However, the school has not been sufficiently focused on maintaining a relentless pursuit of improved standards. As a result, there has not been sufficient improvement in this important area of its work since the previous inspection. Changes that have led to a sharper performance-management process in order to focus more precisely on raising achievement have been put into place recently to tackle this issue.
68. The leadership of the school has successfully negotiated specialist Sports College status, and this has provided considerable impetus to the school's drive to achieve its ambitions for its students. This has coincided with a recent re-structuring of the senior leadership team. The headteacher, together with the senior team, has led curriculum development well, with considerable innovation in Years 10 and 11, and on into the sixth form. A wide range of new courses has recently been introduced, tailored more closely to the needs of individual students of all capabilities; many offer improved vocational opportunities, and are designed to promote achievement, students' self-confidence, and leadership opportunities.
69. Improved systems and strategies for raising achievement are being established, but are only starting to impact sufficiently on standards. Currently, expectations about students' achievement are still too low. Subject leadership is satisfactory overall, and teamwork is a developing feature, but there are some crucial weaknesses. Links between subjects and senior staff are established, and subject leaders are held to account for their subject's performance. Other systems of accountability are not well embedded and result in inconsistency between subjects in implementing agreed policies, for example, in monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, and in assessment practice. Leadership in religious education, citizenship, music, and history is very good; there is room for improvement in the leadership of ICT and geography. In mathematics, the new leadership is now tackling very effectively a legacy of unsatisfactory practices and teaching and there is a very good capacity for improvement in the subject as a result. However, students are still under-achieving in the subject.
70. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body takes an active role in supporting the leadership of the school, based upon their establishing an effective working relationship with the senior leadership team in particular. Governors make a positive contribution to the planning and decisions that help to shape the vision and direction of the school, particularly in the areas of staffing and financial management. Their contribution to the re-structuring of the management system has been particularly effective. Similarly, their role in developing the school's specialist sports status has been valuable. Governors have a satisfactory knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in the school, but they do not challenge the senior management sufficiently about the standards and quality produced. Governors have not ensured that the school fully meets the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. However, students' spiritual and moral development is satisfactory and governors try to ensure that morning registration sessions include an appropriate consideration of a thought for the week. There are some minor omissions in the information the school sends to parents.

71. There are some clear strengths in the management of the school. The school's specialist Sports College status has come about due to farsighted planning and good management. The benefit of this status is being seen in the very good links being established with the community and other schools and colleges and the enhanced learning opportunities that have resulted. The specialist status has not been in place long enough to see any clear impact on standards beyond teaching and learning in physical education. The school modified its management structure two years ago to capitalise on the strengths that it has. One consequence is that some systems and strategies are not fully developed and need to be embedded into the school's practice. The management of the school is unsatisfactory overall because in crucial areas, improvement is needed. The school's evaluation of its own performance lacks the necessary rigour to provide a basis for moving forward and promote a relentless drive to improve standards by raising expectations of teachers and aspirations of students. Assessment and target setting have too many inconsistencies in their application across the school. As a result, the school's GCSE results have not improved at the rate of improvement nationally, and recent results are well below those of students in similar schools. The monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning are not undertaken with sufficient rigour and regularity, particularly by subject heads of department. In consequence, teaching and learning have not improved since the previous inspection; there is too much teaching that is unsatisfactory, very good teaching practice is not shared sufficiently and weaker teaching is not tackled effectively.
72. The school's arrangements for ensuring equality of opportunity and monitoring the progress of different groups are good overall. Leadership has been effective in placing a high priority on inclusion and equality of opportunity. This has ensured that teachers are aware of equality issues, resulting in good provision for equality of opportunity in most subjects, with no subjects where provision is unsatisfactory. The school has appropriate policies for ensuring equality of opportunity and racial harmony and these are implemented effectively by all staff. Programmes to tackle underachievement have been offered equally to all groups of students.
73. The leadership and management of provision for students with special educational needs are effective in ensuring that teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and students achieve as well as they should. The whole school approach to special needs has some very good features, notably close co-operation with outside agencies, the development of provision for specialist support and the development of different roles for support staff. The exchange of information and ideas, both within school and between school and support services, is very effective and helps to ensure good provision overall.
74. The school has taken a positive approach to performance management and procedures are fully implemented. There are good and effective procedures in place for supporting the professional development of teachers. Priority is given to the training needs associated with the school improvement plan, departmental plans and those identified as a result of performance management reviews. The induction of staff new to the school is very good. All the new staff, including those who are newly qualified, have mentors and "buddies" and the school provides a programme of meetings on a range of relevant whole school topics. The school makes an excellent contribution to initial teacher training.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3695930
Total expenditure	3655092
Expenditure per student	4216

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	-289060
Balance carried forward to the next	-248222

75. Financial planning and management are good. The principles of best value are applied prudently and effectively. There are good processes in place to ensure that the school consults and compares to gain best value in its spending. Educational priorities are costed appropriately and the school has a sound view of how priorities can be afforded. Specific funds are used appropriately, for example Excellence in Cities (EiC) funding is used effectively to provide courses and visits outside school that extend gifted and talented students' experience and help to raise their aspirations. The large deficit that grew to March 2004, primarily the result of staffing costs, has largely been eliminated. The school has an agreed action plan, formulated with the local education authority, to move to a balanced budget in the near future and is on course to do so. The main school provides satisfactory value for money and the sixth form is cost effective.

Sixth form

76. The leadership of the sixth form is good. There is a clear and distinctive vision shared by governors, staff and the senior leadership team of what the sixth form looks to provide to best meet the needs and aspirations of students and serve the interests of the community.
77. The head of sixth form works closely with the director of studies 14 to 19 in ensuring the ambition for an open access sixth form is realised. Sixth form development planning successfully focuses on improvements and extension to the curriculum, and to the required pastoral and management structures. Many students are now following vocational routes to accreditation, sometimes in combination with academic A-level courses. Students confirm that they are able to follow the courses of their choice and this, together with the good support provided by tutors, results in good retention and course completion rates across the sixth form. A positive feature of the provision means that students who come from backgrounds where continuing education has not been the pattern are able to stay into the sixth form and study worthwhile courses. The specialist Sports College status is giving further impetus to ensuring a curriculum that best meets the needs and aspirations of the student body.
78. Subject leadership in the sixth form is mainly good in the subjects focused upon during the inspection. However, improvements have only recently taken place in mathematics and have still to make enough impact on the teaching quality and the standards obtained, although Year 12 work has improved significantly. Good subject leadership has a clear picture of what sort of students enter the sixth form and how best to meet their needs, together with a strategic view of what needs to be done. The recent acquisition of specialist Sports College status has provided considerable impetus to the opportunities provided within physical education.
79. The management of the sixth form is satisfactory. The sixth form provision is cost-effective. Students are pleased with the provision they receive. However, there are some areas that require improvement that detract from otherwise good management. The monitoring of teaching and learning experiences the same difficulties encountered in the main school. There is some good practice, but this is patchy and does not promote the spreading of the good practice that exists, nor the identification and tackling of unsatisfactory teaching. Arrangements for the support and guidance of sixth form students work well in general. Review procedures are good and effective and regular tutorials help students reach their academic and personal targets. However, assessment data is not used sufficiently to add precision and rigour to the process. In managing the provision of key skills, there is some good practice but there is no overview of the contribution made by each department, and provision is inconsistent.

There are not enough computers in the sixth form area to support independent learning; most students are able to overcome this barrier to learning by going elsewhere for this facility.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING (WRL)

Provision for WRL is good. It meets statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- WRL is very well established as part of the school's curriculum and students respond positively to the variety of opportunities offered.
- There are very good WRL opportunities because of the wide range of courses provided.
- Links with the community, including businesses and colleges, are very good.
- There are good programmes of careers education and guidance, and work experience.
- Provision for all students has not received sufficient emphasis in planning and development of the subject.

Commentary

80. In 2004, GCSE results in health and social care and business studies were well below average. Of the 21 students completing the WRL course, 16 gained the ASDAN silver award and two gained bronze awards. The same students had a wide variety of achievements recognised through the award of a total of 177 unit achievement certificates.
81. In the wide variety of courses provided, students' achievement is satisfactory and in line with their overall achievement. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons seen indicate a significant amount of good teaching. There is a work-related learning base that provides some students with very good opportunities to combine work in the classroom with "real world" practical activities. Students' experience is further enhanced by off-site activities including work placements and college experience. The range, variety and relevance of the provision produce positive attitudes towards learning.
82. WRL has been well established in the school over a number of years, with its own accommodation and staff. In many senses this has been a catalyst for innovation and development in the wider school curriculum. The very good range of courses now on offer significantly enhances WRL opportunities. In addition the provision of a course for some Year 9 students plus the wide range of opportunities in the sixth form add coherence and continuity to the provision overall.
83. There are good programmes for careers education and work experience. Careers education and guidance is planned well and its delivery is good. The Connexions service is appropriately involved in working with groups and individuals to provide independent careers advice. The work experience programme is well organised and administered by the school.
84. The leadership and management of WRL are good. Innovative curriculum planning has been effective in refining and expanding provision. Alternative forms of accreditation have been incorporated into developments very well and are an important motivator for

students. Curriculum development and planning have previously concentrated on identified groups rather than on reviewing provision for all students. Recent developments have more effectively provided enhanced opportunities for all. Very good and well-established links with the local business education partnership, local employers and colleges within the region support WRL activities very well.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- After considerable disruption, stable staffing now ensures satisfactory teaching.
- The head of department provides good leadership.
- Current achievement is satisfactory following GCSE results that were too low.
- Assessment procedures to support learning require improvement.
- Expectations about students' attitudes to learning need to be raised further.

Commentary

85. Students enter the school with below average standards. Standards of literacy are not as high on entry as standards of numeracy. The proportion entering with very low standards is significantly above that found in most schools. In 2004, the results in the end of Year 9 tests were below average and broadly satisfactory in terms of achievement. In the 2004 GCSE English examination, the proportion at A*-C was well below average and not as high as it should have been. The English literature A*-C grades were above average, but the entry rate was lower than most schools. Results in all 2004 external examinations were undermined by severe disruption to staffing.
86. Standards in the current Years 9 are below average. This represents satisfactory achievement given the students' below average standards on entry. Achievement is improving because, since September 2004, the department has comprised a stable team of specialist English teachers. In Year 9, about six out of ten students are working at the expected Level 5 or higher. About one in five are at the higher Level 6 or higher. A significant number does not meet the expected standards. Many make too many errors and do not respond in sufficient length or detail. In Year 11, standards are below average. Students' achievement is satisfactory. The course work of almost half the students is at grade C or higher. A few higher attaining students are gaining the very highest grades. In both Years 9 and 11 there are groups of students whose standards are too low to enable them to enter external tests or GCSE examinations. Despite good special needs support from teaching and non-teaching staff, their progress is no better than satisfactory. One inhibiting factor is that their teaching groups are too large given these students' considerably challenging needs, despite the groups being smaller than in other classes. No evidence of standards in numeracy was observed. ICT skills are satisfactory, although planned opportunities are not always provided because of restricted access to equipment.
87. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Where good teaching was seen, features included the use of clear learning objectives supported by activities that matched the objectives. In the better lessons, teachers ensured a good sense of pace, purpose and urgency. Students clearly knew what was expected from them in terms of the work attitudes they bring to the lessons. However, in other lessons learning was

satisfactory. Its effectiveness was undermined by a lack of positive attitudes to learning. Various weaknesses observed included a lack of clear routines for starting and finishing lessons, presentation and answering questions. There was not an explicit enough focus on learning objectives at the start, during and end of lessons so the learning purpose of activities was undermined. Too much time was given to some tasks - for students of all attainments - so undermining pace, concentration and motivation. Assessment is satisfactory. Many comments on course work in Years 10 and 11 specifically explain both the strengths and weakness of the assignments. This degree of explicitness is less apparent in Years 8 and 9, although is starting to take hold in Year 7 following recent initiatives. However, discussion with students showed that throughout the school too many are not clear enough about their level or grade targets or about how to achieve them.

88. Subject leadership is good. The relatively recently appointed head of department is establishing a good team approach based on the shared and accepted judgement that results have not been high enough. The department is improving as a consequence. Management is satisfactory. There is some good analysis of relative boy/girl strengths and weaknesses. However, the analysis of data to evaluate effectiveness of teaching and learning and to set targets that are both aspirational and realistic is not yet secure. More frequent formal assessment and tracking of progress are emerging but not yet rigorously or frequently enough. There are good systems for lesson observation. After a rapid turnover of personnel at all levels, stable staffing and good leadership indicate good capacity for recovery. The effect of the restored stability indicates satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

89. Standards are below average and in line with the students' standards on entry. The proportion that enters the school with very low standards is higher than in most schools. These students benefit from well-focused programmes to support their progress on very basic skills. Although higher attainers explain themselves clearly, both orally and in writing, most students are below average in respect of these skills. Spoken answers in class tend to be short and not expanded. The application of subject specific vocabulary is not consistent.
90. Overall arrangements for developing literacy are satisfactory. There is some good practice where specific attention to literacy development as an integral part of the teaching and learning process leads to above average outcomes. In history, for example, a planned and concerted focus on the development of writing skills leads to students developing competence in explanatory, interpretative, analytical and empathetic forms of writing. In religious education a constant focus on how to use key vocabulary enables the students to show their understanding of key concepts. Outcomes are better as a consequence. Other subjects tend not to be equally and consistently explicit in their approach. The school has targeted literacy for development and used training materials provided by the Key Stage 3 strategy. However, the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of these initiatives on learning have not been systematic enough.

Modern foreign languages

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in French have improved significantly and are now above average.

- Students achieve well in lively lessons where teaching is challenging.
- The French department is led well and has secured many improvements over recent years.
- The department's computerised whiteboard and mini whiteboards are used very creatively and result in effective presentation, practice and consolidation of new language.
- Some low attaining students have good opportunities to develop their communication skills.
- In a few lessons students are not challenged sufficiently and not given enough opportunity to practise new language orally.
- There is insufficient challenging homework set.

Commentary

91. In 2004, all seven students entered for GCSE in French took their examination at the end of their Year 10 and gained grades in the range A*-C. This represented good achievement given their prior attainment. Girls did better than boys by the same margin as nationally. These results represent students' great commitment and enthusiasm, since their French lessons all took place before the start of the normal school day. These results marked a significant improvement over 2003, when they were below average.
92. This upward trend in standards continues in the classroom and in students' written work. Standards in Year 9 are now average and students achieve well. Many understand lessons conducted entirely in French and use French to make requests or comments. Higher attaining students write accurately and are confident using past, present and future tenses and have an awareness of basic grammar. There is some extended writing, but teachers do not set enough demanding written homework. Many students of lower attainment and those with learning needs achieve as well as their peers when they are well supported in doing challenging and motivating tasks.
93. Standards in the Year 11 class are above average overall and students achieve well. Teachers' high expectations and students' positive attitudes have been significant in this improvement. The highest attaining students use past, present and future tenses confidently and accurately in the context of GCSE topics. Many have learned to construct more complex sentences, containing subordinate clauses and more varied language to help them secure A* standards. Good opportunities to practise orally and in written form ensure that lower attaining students are able to make themselves well understood in French. All students at this stage have above-average listening skills because they hear so much fluently-spoken French.
94. Teaching is good overall and leads to good learning in most lessons. Some teaching is unsatisfactory, however, and this results in underachievement in some lessons. Teachers are fluent speakers of French and in good lessons, French is the main language of communication, so that students learn to listen and make sense of what they hear. In a few lessons, however, too much English is used and students' listening skills are underdeveloped. Lessons generally start well and are very orderly and well managed. This results in good behaviour and good relationships. Homework is set regularly, but is not always sufficiently challenging. The computerised whiteboard is used very effectively to present and practise new language. Marking is generally good and helps students to improve their work, but some students' work is not marked regularly. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is slow and students have too few opportunities to practise new language orally or to work independently or in pairs.

95. The French department is led well and management is satisfactory. Leadership is focused on the raising of standards and providing a very good model in the classroom. The departmental scheme of work is currently under review to reflect new teaching materials and approaches. There is insufficient monitoring, however, of standards of teaching and learning and the homework policy needs to be reviewed, which means that management is satisfactory rather than good. The trips to France make a good contribution to increasing motivation and rising standards. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Teaching and learning have improved, results at GCSE have risen and standards observed in Year 11 are above average.

German

Provision in German is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in German are above average in Year 11.
- Students in Year 11 achieve well because of good teaching, allied to students' own positive attitudes.
- The German department is well led and teachers share ideas and resources effectively.
- ICT is not used sufficiently to enhance learning.
- The visits and exchanges to German speaking countries increase motivation and raise standards.

Commentary

96. In 2004, GCSE results were average and many students did better in German than in their other subjects. All students gained a GCSE grade and an average proportion were awarded the grades A*-C. Girls did better than boys but not by more than the national difference. These results represent good achievement given students' prior attainment.
97. Standards in Year 9 are average and students achieve well. Many speak confidently and pronounce familiar words and phrases well. Some use German spontaneously to ask for things or to say they have finished their work. Higher attaining students use different tenses to describe events in the past and hopes for the future. Students of lower attainment and those with learning needs mostly achieve equally well, especially in developing their speaking and listening skills, because they are taught with the same level of challenge. Some low attaining students under-achieve however, because of low expectations and lack of challenge. Many students present their written work well and it is an accurate account of oral work covered in lessons. There are insufficient examples of extended writing.
98. Standards in Year 11 are above average and students achieve well. The small group of students taking GCSE is challenged by demanding and imaginative teaching, which has resulted in a further increase in standards since last year. Boys and girls are equally good at understanding spoken German, because it is used almost all the time in lessons by very fluent teachers. All students have good pronunciation and master a good range of vocabulary and structures. The highest attaining students write accurately on the GCSE prepared topics using varied vocabulary. Students add to their own achievement by their commitment, strong motivation and good behaviour.

99. Teaching is good and leads to effective learning in most lessons. Occasionally, however, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Teachers are very good speakers of German and generally use it nearly all the time so that students develop above average listening and communication skills. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, too much English is used. Most teaching is demanding and well suited to the needs and interests of both boys and girls. There is generally good use of humour, plenty of pace, lots of visual stimulation and good opportunities for speaking. Where teaching is unsatisfactory the pace is slow and there are few opportunities for students to speak or listen to German. Teachers generally praise students for their efforts, which helps them to gain the confidence to experiment with language. Teachers also correct students' mistakes very carefully, which helps them to make progress orally. Marking is good with lots of positive remarks and helpful comments on how to improve. There is not enough use of ICT to present and practise new language and students do not have access to specialised software in order to work independently.
100. The German department is well led and managed satisfactorily. The teachers work well together and support each other well. There is a need, however, for a more systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. The department's accommodation imposes some constraints on teaching and learning. There is regular assessment of standards, which is effective in ensuring that students' performance is carefully tracked to keep under-achievement to the minimum. Activities outside the timetable such as the GCSE languages clinic and the annual trips to Germany and Austria all contribute to students' achievement and their personal development. For these reasons the progress made since the previous inspection has been good. Teaching and learning are now good and GCSE results have improved from well below average to average.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are not high enough in both Years 9 and 11.
- The new leadership is very good and is improving provision.
- There is too much unsatisfactory teaching where students' achievement is unsatisfactory.
- There are insufficient qualified teachers of mathematics to provide a good quality curriculum for all students.
- There are insufficient ICT resources to help students learn.
- Provision for students with the most severe special educational needs is good.

Commentary

101. In the National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in 2004, standards were average overall. This was due to a good improvement in the proportion of students attaining the highest levels. Too many students who had average attainment on entry to the school failed to reach the level expected in Year 9. A similarly unusual picture occurred in 2004 GCSE results. Here the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C was well below average and lower than in most other subjects in the school, but taking point scores allocated to different grades as a measure, results were average. This was because those with lower attainment, including those with special educational needs, achieved well. Achievement of too many students in both Years 9 and 11 was unsatisfactory. The school's targets for students based on prior attainment were not reached. Examination results for students in Year 9 have improved at a higher rate than nationally over the

last five years, but results are still too low in relation to students' attainment on entry. GCSE results have shown very little change and improvement is unsatisfactory.

102. Students in Years 9 and 11 entered school with average standards in mathematics. In both years standards are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory overall. However, in some classes, all students do well due to the quality of teaching in those classes. From Year 7 upwards, the presentation of work, including drawing, written work and graph work, is unsatisfactory. Students do not develop good work habits, or develop pride in their work. Mental skills are too low because teachers have not fully implemented the most recent National Curriculum guidance.
103. Teaching is unsatisfactory and leads to unsatisfactory learning. About one in six lessons observed were unsatisfactory, but there was an equal proportion of very good lessons. Non-specialists or temporary teachers have taught too many classes for too long or classes are shared between teachers, due to staffing difficulties. This unsettled situation has been the main cause of unsatisfactory learning and achievement, although there are other weaknesses in teaching. These include a lack of classroom management skills, meaning that time is wasted because students' behaviour and attitudes deteriorate, a lack of rigour in developing students' knowledge and understanding, and low expectations of students' performance. In addition marking is inconsistent; it is not used sufficiently well either to help students see how to improve or to plan work matched to students' needs within sets. In the most effective lessons teachers show very good subject expertise and an enthusiasm for their subject, often using illustrations that are real and relevant to the students in their own lives. Opportunities are taken to develop speaking and listening skills and key vocabulary, and to link concepts in order to revisit and keep knowledge and skills fresh. In these lessons, students respond well, gaining confidence and self-esteem, and because they clearly enjoy the lessons, they work hard. Students with the lowest attainment on entry do well, and this is reflected in GCSE examinations where almost all students who take the examination gain an acceptable grade.
104. The new leadership is very good. Much has been accomplished, but the staffing situation and accompanying problems have impeded progress. The subject leader has a very comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the department and has chosen an appropriate path to remedy the many weaknesses and build up a successful department. Management, at present, is judged satisfactory rather than better because many of the strategies being put into place have not had time to show sufficient improvements in examination results or in higher standards in Years 9 and 11. Time constraints to date have not allowed the new leadership to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning with enough rigour and regularity. Although much has been done to develop support materials and purchase essential equipment, there is still some way to go. There is insufficient ICT equipment to support learning or provide the full range of experiences expected in the mathematics curriculum.

Numeracy across the curriculum

105. The development of numeracy skills in subjects other than ICT is unsatisfactory. Work has been started to raise all teachers' awareness of the different strategies used in problem solving and mental arithmetic. Whole school training has taken place, although the follow-up to this has been delayed slightly. There is a suitable action plan to improve cross-curricular links. Satisfactory use is made of numeracy skills in other subjects, and when opportunities arise, skills are taught within other subjects. As yet, very few subjects identify numeracy in planning and devise strategies to improve students' numeracy skills.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a clear focus on improving standards and the quality of teaching but some lessons do not challenge the students enough.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning are not focused enough on raising achievement.
- Assessment is used well to set targets for improvement but marking is inconsistent and does not always help students to improve their work.
- Behaviour is generally good, although many students are not well motivated to learn.
- A good range of courses to suit the needs of all students has been developed.

Commentary

106. Standards in the 2004 national tests for Year 9 students were below average but they were in line with those in similar schools. These results were slightly below the 2003 figure although standards have improved over the last four years at about the national rate. Taken over this period, boys and girls have attained similar standards. Targets set by the school were not achieved. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, results were below average, targets were not reached and students under-achieved. Average points scores were in line with similar schools, but the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C was well below average. The results were slightly below the previous year. Girls' results were better than boys when compared to the national differences in standards.
107. Standards seen on the inspection are below average in Years 9 and 11; they are better in Years 10 and 11 than the last GCSE results because some major staffing difficulties have now been resolved. Satisfactory teaching in Years 7 to 9 enables the students to progress at the expected rate, leading to satisfactory achievement in these years. Students with special educational needs are well supported and achieve well as a result. Higher attaining students have good recall of work they have done previously but overall standards in biology, chemistry and physics are below average, with many students having a weak grasp of fundamental ideas that underpin the work. Routine practical work is carried out effectively and safely but many students have below average understanding of fair testing, analysis and evaluation of results. For example, Year 8 students were able to follow instructions to carry out a practical experiment on the activity of enzymes but very few were able to explain the scientific ideas behind the work or to predict what they might expect to happen, using prior knowledge. Most students have sufficient grasp of mathematics and ICT skills to undertake work in science but many have weak skills of communication that hinder their learning. For example, many students in all years use very imprecise language when explaining their work, often failing to use correct scientific vocabulary.
108. Teaching is satisfactory overall throughout the school, with some good teaching seen in all years. Lessons are planned well and varied teaching methods are being adopted to make the work more interesting and relevant. Practical work is also used to good effect and teachers are beginning to use ICT to enhance their lessons, where suitable equipment is available. In the most successful lessons work proceeds at a good pace and is set at a level that challenges and stretches the students, allowing them to achieve well. For example, a Year 11 lesson on radioactivity was planned well to include a variety of activities, with extension work to challenge

higher attaining students. Good management ensured that the lesson proceeded at a brisk pace, so that learning was good and all students achieved well.

109. Class management is usually good and as a result most students behave well, but many have a low concentration span and are not well motivated to learn. In the less successful lessons, this, together with a lack of challenge in the work, leads to a slow pace and inhibits learning and achievement. This reluctance to learn is overcome where teaching is presented in a lively and interesting way, as in a Year 9 lesson on adaptation in plants and animals that was introduced by a slideshow that engaged the students and resulted in good behaviour and application to work. A good system of assessment on which to base targets has been established and this allows students' progress to be monitored. However, routine marking is inconsistent and does not always give students enough guidance on how to improve.
110. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory overall. The joint heads of department have provided good leadership in establishing a clear focus on improving standards and the quality of teaching. Development plans tackle these issues and training has been provided to enable teachers to gain the necessary skills. The implementation of these plans has been managed satisfactorily although it has been hampered by recruitment difficulties that have resulted in instability in staffing and the use of experienced but non-specialist teachers. These difficulties are now being resolved as a more stable staffing structure is being put into place and non-specialist staff are becoming more expert at teaching the subject. A system of monitoring, including regular classroom observation, has been established and this has the potential to raise standards. However it has not yet focused closely enough on raising achievement and eliminating inconsistencies in marking.
111. Teamwork in the department is good and teaching is supported by very good schemes of work. The curriculum is well designed to match the students' needs and includes a GCSE course in applied science. The national strategy to raise standards in Years 7 to 9 has been implemented and methods from it are being incorporated into teaching. These factors are helping to improve provision for science, although it is too early yet for there to have been any significant impact on examination results. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, with good curriculum development, less unsatisfactory teaching and an improvement in Year 9 test results. Teachers are supported effectively by two well-qualified technicians. Accommodation and resources are adequate although teachers' access to ICT equipment is inconsistent.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards overall are below average in Year 9 and Year 11, though achievement is satisfactory.
- While teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, some unsatisfactory teaching takes place that does not capture the interest of the students.
- Teachers' low expectations and lack of challenge prevent higher attaining students from gaining better levels and grades.
- The implementation of a broader curriculum now ensures all students have ICT lessons.

Commentary

112. The results for the small group of students who entered the applied ICT course in 2004 were above the national average. However, there were very few higher grades. These were not as good as the GNVQ results in previous years.
113. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 judged standards to be just below average, with very few students gaining the higher levels. In the work seen in Year 9, standards of work are below average. This represents satisfactory achievement given students' below average attainment on entry. Students use ICT with some confidence. They design simple documents for use in a small business, but the layout is not always suitable: for example, sometimes graphics cover up text. Students' evaluations of these documents are mainly factual and do not really assess how well the document could be used in the business. They explain how to obtain information for a particular application, but only the higher attaining students make any real attempt to evaluate the reliability of the source of the information.
114. The standards of work in Year 11 are below average. This represents overall satisfactory achievement. Students design ICT solutions, for example for a veterinary surgery. They design advertising leaflets and websites. The lower attaining students do not use correct formatting or include effective hyperlinks in web pages. They complete basic tasks without really understanding why ICT is used or its impact. Even the higher attaining students are not always able to explain the effect of a negative balance in a spreadsheet.
115. The quality of teaching and learning across Years 7 to 11 is satisfactory. In lessons where challenging tasks are set, students have a positive attitude and are willing to work and extend their skills and understanding. They know what they have to do and are productive. Teachers provide individual support and students work independently. In some lessons the review sessions are too short to fully assess progress. There is some unsatisfactory teaching which does not capture the interest of the students and so they do not learn or achieve as well as they should. In these lessons teachers do not explain tasks sufficiently, so students do not understand exactly what they have to do. They lose interest and their learning is interrupted by misbehaviour, which is not effectively managed.
116. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students except in badly managed lessons. Expectations for higher attaining or gifted and talented students are low. The lack of differentiated activities to challenge these students has resulted in very few higher levels and grades. In Years 7 to 8 assessment sheets tell students what they have to do to gain particular National Curriculum levels. However, these are limited to levels 3 to 5, so they do not know how to gain the higher levels. In Years 10 to 11, students are not always sure what grades they are aiming for, as the assessment procedures lack thoroughness. The use of homework is inconsistent and not sufficiently focused to consolidate learning. Marking does not always provide constructive comments to show how students can raise their standards. Simple writing frames help students write factual evaluations, but opportunities for developing speaking and reading skills are missed. Numeracy skills are not well developed and students are not always able to explain, for example, how they use a spreadsheet to calculate the average of six numbers or the area of a wall.
117. Both leadership and management are satisfactory and there has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. There is vision and commitment to develop discrete ICT. There is monitoring of performance and teaching but it is not sufficiently rigorous

to raise standards. The department runs smoothly, but recent staffing instability has hindered learning. The use of data is beginning to inform curriculum planning. The curriculum in Years 7 to 8 provides students with a range of ICT activities, but students cannot gain higher levels as they do not fully experience measurement and control. In Year 9 students begin the GCSE applied ICT course, though some have not gained sufficient basic ICT skills in previous years. All students in Years 10 and 11 now follow an ICT course. Lack of lesson time in Years 10 and 11 is holding back achievement and the requirements of the course prevent lower attaining students from achieving as well as they should. There are two well-designed ICT rooms, with just sufficient space to work with computers, with a student computer ratio of 1:5. This is in line with national expectations.

ICT across the curriculum

118. Overall, there is unsatisfactory use of ICT in other subjects. There is good use in history to extend students' understanding of difficult issues such as the Holocaust, and in French where the computerised whiteboard is used very effectively to present and practise new language. Students use ICT in a number of subjects to enhance the presentation of their classwork and coursework. Digital cameras are used to good effect in physical education and religious education and in science, computer simulations help students understand difficult concepts such as decay. In some other subjects computer-based presentations bring a new dimension to lessons. However, the lack of adequate resources in mathematics and English impedes progress. In science, out-of-date equipment and laptops awaiting repair prevent good learning. The difficulties in maintaining and using the current stock of computers in music have had an adverse effect on learning. The provision in art and design is poor – so students do not enjoy a crucial element of the art and design curriculum. The number of technical support staff is insufficient for the size of the school and number of computers. This has an adverse impact on maintenance and repair when computers fail due to age or misuse. The management of ICT in other subjects lacks cohesion. The inadequate resources in the sixth form impede the effective use of ICT to enhance learning.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In recent years GCSE results have been well below average because students under-achieved.
- The new head of department is providing good direction for the subject.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well, but the quality of marking and the use of homework are unsatisfactory.
- Procedures to review the work of the department are currently unsatisfactory, but the new leadership of the department has identified what needs to be done and is implementing strategies to address this.

Commentary

119. The proportion of students gaining grades A* to C in the 2004 GCSE examinations was well below average and results have declined in the last three years, reflecting unsatisfactory achievement. Coursework was identified as a major weakness. However, the subject has remained popular and the number of students studying it has

remained above average. At the higher grades A* to C, girls performed significantly better than boys in 2004.

120. In Year 9, standards are below average. Map work and research skills are underdeveloped. For example, students' understanding of geographical location is weak. Lower attaining students show sound knowledge of physical and human geography but their understanding is weak, as is their use of geographical language. Higher attaining students use extended writing successfully and show an understanding of cause and effect. They use geographical language well.
121. Standards in Year 11 are below average but are improving. Previous weaknesses with coursework are being addressed and students are now better prepared and have a better understanding of how to organise their work and how it will be assessed. Higher attaining students write well and show a good understanding of geographical terms. Middle and lower attaining students can describe geographical features satisfactorily but are weaker when explaining events and using geographical language.
122. Students enter the school with standards that are below average. The achievement of students in Years 7 to 9 and those who opt for the subject in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. This is because of satisfactory teaching and the satisfactory attitudes they demonstrate towards learning. The achievement of students with special educational needs is satisfactory. Boys and girls of all abilities achieve equally well.
123. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Students benefit from a team of specialist teachers who use their good subject knowledge well to make learning fun but purposeful. Teachers make good use of ICT and video to engage students in learning. Students' writing and recording of information are supported well by the use of good quality teacher-produced resources. However, there is insufficient access to computers for students to develop their writing and research skills. A weak feature in lessons is that planning fails to meet the needs of all learners and students do not have activities that challenge them appropriately. The use of homework is unsatisfactory, as it is not used to reinforce and develop what students are learning in their lessons. Teaching assistants are deployed well in some lessons and make a significant contribution by supporting students with special educational needs so that they are able to keep up with the pace of the lesson. Marking is unsatisfactory. Students have insufficient guidance on how well they are doing in relation to the national average and what they need to do to improve. Management of students' behaviour is good. Students display satisfactory attitudes to the subject and relationships in lessons are good.
124. The leadership and management of geography are satisfactory overall. The new head of department is providing good leadership in establishing a clear direction for the subject. There has been unsatisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Although GCSE results have declined, the new leadership of the department has identified what needs to be done and is implementing strategies to address this. The department now has the capacity to improve. The subject head has identified appropriate priorities for improvement, but staff absence has reduced their impact. Planning and documentation are good and provide good guidance to her team of colleagues. A good teamwork approach is developing and members of the department meet on a regular basis. Management is satisfactory overall, but there are areas that need to be improved. Procedures to review the work of the department are unsatisfactory. Work scrutiny has been implemented but there is no monitoring and evaluation of assessment practices and no formal programme to observe teaching and learning. There is insufficient use of data to monitor and track students' performance. The curriculum is enhanced by fieldwork and after-school classes. In Year 10 students

undertake fieldwork in the Lake District and in Years 7 to 9 good use is made of the school site. In Year 11 students have after-school classes to support their coursework and examination preparation.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching is leading to good achievement by all students in Years 7 to 11.
- Good leadership has established an effective teaching team of both specialist and non-specialist teachers.
- History makes a strong contribution to students' literacy skills.
- History is a popular subject with students.
- There is a need to formalise the monitoring of teaching within the department.
- Non-specialist teachers require further support in the teaching of history.

Commentary

125. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were below average, but achievement was good in relation to the prior attainment of the group as a whole. There is some evidence of underachievement amongst some of the girls, but the school has taken action to address this. Over recent years results have been above average.
126. In Year 9 standards are average. This represents good achievement as, on entry to the school, standards were below average and many students had limited knowledge of history. By Year 9, students have a good understanding of a range of topics such as the Holocaust and the First World War. Their work shows the ability to research material and the particular emphasis on the development of literacy skills results in students producing detailed accounts and some examples of very well structured writing. Students can interpret written and visual sources effectively. Imaginative work is produced which illustrates their understanding in unusual ways, such as the development of a board game to illustrate life in the trenches or the making of models. In Year 11 standards are above average and achievement is good. Students' knowledge and understanding of topics such as the reasons for the rise of the Nazi party are secure. They have an understanding of causes and consequences that led to the rise of dictatorships. Well-structured writing is produced. Discussion is lively and students respond well to the imaginative use of ICT by teachers. The teaching of history actively promotes students' social and moral development through consideration of the suffering of the Jews and the effects of war on peoples' attitudes.
127. The overall quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good, with examples of very good teaching by the specialist history teachers. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are also good. Lessons are planned well, with clear objectives that are readily understood by students. Generally, expectations are high and when challenged students work hard and well. In the majority of lessons work is well matched to the specific needs of students. Those students who have special needs are catered for through literacy support and higher attaining students receive extension tasks to ensure they are effectively challenged. Occasionally, when teaching is satisfactory rather than good, the lesson lacks pace and too much time is spent on teacher-directed activities. However, in lessons that are very good, teaching is imaginative and highly focused, generating enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the students. Very good use is made of ICT and video material to make the lessons vivid and memorable, as in a Year 9

lesson on Auschwitz. Students' interest and enthusiasm are also developed through a range of interesting field trips to places such as the Roman fort at Vindolanda and First World War battlefields in France. Students' work is marked and assessed regularly. The assessment system is clear and readily understood by students, thus ensuring that they understand how they can improve. The emphasis on the development of literacy skills ensures that students have the skills necessary for success in the GCSE examinations and the ability to work independently. Book resources are good and the department produces a very good range of supportive material for students. Good use is made of the accommodation in the specialist rooms; displays of work and historical material help create an effective learning ethos.

128. The leadership and management of the subject are good overall and many aspects of leadership are very good. As a result, improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The previous report was favourable and the department has maintained the strengths in teaching and performance, whilst improving assessment systems. There have been significant improvements in the use of ICT to make the teaching of history lively and interesting. The coordinator has maintained the strengths identified in the previous report. She provides clear vision and direction and is a strong professional role model. She has developed a strong team who are committed to raising standards and students achieve well. Non-specialist teachers receive good quality lesson planning to support them. However, there is a need for further support to develop history-teaching skills. Whilst there are effective systems for monitoring students' learning, there is a need to formalise systems for monitoring the quality of teaching.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in all years is at least good; in Years 10 and 11 it is very good as a result of the very good teaching students receive.
- Very good leadership ensures the subject is highly successful in achieving well above average examination results.
- In Years 10 and 11, students' very good learning is underpinned by the very positive attitudes they bring to their work.
- Students do not use ICT enough to support their learning.

Commentary

129. GCSE results in 2004 were well above average. The proportion of students entered for the full course was twice the national average, as was the proportion of students gaining the higher A* and A grades. Students, particularly girls, do better in religious education than in their other subjects. Results were similar in 2003.
130. Standards in Year 9 are below average. Given students' well below average starting points this represents good achievement. Students know about the principal religious beliefs and practices of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. They understand why the Qur'an is so special to Muslims and have a good appreciation of the value Muslims place on Salah or daily prayer. They know and can perform the washing rituals of Wudu and prayer actions of Rak'ah. They understand why pilgrimage is special to Christians, Muslims and Buddhists and why the Four Noble Truths are the most important part of Buddah's teaching. Writing skills are below average and only higher attaining students can express their own ideas at any length. Students' ability to

describe what inspires and motivates themselves and others is below average, as is their ability to find things out for themselves. Their learning is supported by their good attitudes.

131. In Year 11, where all students follow either the full or short GCSE course, roughly in equal numbers, standards are above average and students achieve very well. In the full course group, standards are well above average. Students recognise the experiences that they share with people of different faiths, for example, death and the after-life, and can express and argue a position on moral issues such as the relationship between religion, peace and justice. Standards in the short course are above average. Students have an above-average knowledge and understanding of what is distinctive about each of the six main world religions and can make mature judgments on the diversity of belief and practice within individual religions: for example, in the role of women in Muslim and western cultures. Independent research skills are only average; their ability to use ICT to support their learning is below average. Students' very good attitudes to their work support their learning and contribute significantly to the very good progress they make in this subject.
132. In all years, students with special educational needs, or who are gifted and talented, achieve as well as other students. They are identified in teachers' lesson plans and the work set is appropriate for their needs.
133. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. Teaching is never less than good. Often it is very good and occasionally it is excellent. In Years 7 to 9 teaching is good overall and in Years 10 and 11 it is very good. In all years, high expectations of what students are capable of are the key ingredient in the good or very good learning that takes place in almost all lessons. Teachers use methods that often combine musical and visual stimuli and are very effective in helping students learn, but not enough work is set which expects students to find things out for themselves. Excellent use is made of new technology in presenting lessons, for example, through the use of digital cameras, multi-media projectors and PowerPoint presentations. However, the use of ICT by the students themselves is not encouraged enough, either in lessons or in the homework that is set. Assessment is helpful to students in showing them where they stand in relation to students nationally and targets are set for the end of Year 9 and 11. These are recorded in students' exercise books and measured and recorded against their attainment at the completion of each unit of work. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 because the subject is taught almost exclusively by the two specialist teachers in the department. Their very good knowledge of the subject ensures that what is taught is accurate and appropriate and pitched in ways that help students learn very effectively. Their enthusiasm for the subject rubs off onto the students and motivates them to want to learn. Although there are good links with local faith leaders, there are not enough opportunities to enhance students' learning through visits to places of worship or prayer, particularly mosques and temples.
134. This is a very good department that is very well led and where management is good. Leadership is focused on raising standards through finding new methods of teaching that help students learn most effectively. A very good team ethos has been established which is helping motivate and support teachers in the classroom. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' personal development, particularly through the promotion of students' spiritual and moral values. The requirement to teach the locally agreed syllabus to all students is fully met. Whilst systems for the monitoring of teaching and learning in the subject are in place, because of recent staff absence they

are not currently being implemented for all staff, which detracts from otherwise very good management.

135. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Students' achievement is higher because teaching and learning have improved significantly, as have students' attitudes. Examination results have also improved.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students in all years have positive attitudes to the subject, which contribute to their good achievement.
- Teaching is consistently good.
- Leadership and management are good and effective strategies have been put in place to improve the attainment of students, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is very good and offers a wide choice for students.
- Not enough attention is given to the systematic and progressive development of design and graphical skills in Years 7 to 9.
- Students' use of ICT, including computer-aided design and manufacture, is not fully integrated into schemes of work for all courses.

Commentary

136. In 2004, students gained results in their GCSE examinations that were well below average at the higher A*-C grades, but were just below average overall. The results were below average in graphic products and well below average in food and resistant materials. The attainments of boys and girls were broadly similar at the higher grades. Overall, students achieved better results in design and technology than in most of their other subjects.
137. In the work seen in Year 9, standards are below average, in line with recent teacher assessments. However, achievement is good as the starting point in Year 7 is well below average for the majority of students. The standards of the girls are slightly above those of the boys. In general the girls have design skills that are slightly better developed than those of the boys. Making and constructional skills in all materials are more highly developed than design and graphical skills for the majority of students. Higher attaining students have a more secure grasp of subject knowledge and specialist vocabulary. Teachers plan projects and tasks carefully, using a variety of materials that make increasing demands on students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs. As a consequence all students make good progress from a low starting point in terms of experience and attainment. Students are not given enough opportunities to experience computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture, or to use their ICT skills to develop their work.
138. In Year 11, standards are below average overall. At this time less than half the students in Years 10 and 11 choose to study the subject after Year 9. For those who opt to continue their studies, mainly middle and lower attaining students, achievement is good. However, in the work seen during the inspection there are clear indications

that standards are rising on all GCSE courses and achievement is particularly good in graphics and for many students on the food technology course. The standards reached by boys and girls are broadly similar. Design skills continue to be less well developed than making and constructional skills for the majority of students. The higher attaining students generally have better developed graphical skills, especially those on the graphics course, and their subject knowledge and vocabulary are more secure. In Year 10, the students on the newly introduced catering and engineering courses are achieving well.

139. Teaching and learning are good in all years. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan effective lessons with clear learning objectives. However, the objectives are not always shared with the students, nor is the progress made reviewed at the end of the lesson, and therefore these lessons lack the sharp focus usually found. The projects used are varied and interesting but the challenge is lost when time deadlines are not set for the completion of intermediate tasks. The teachers use a range of appropriate methods to engage the students with the learning, and explanations, questioning and demonstrations are particularly effective in developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills. Resources of good quality are provided to support students' learning. In all lessons teachers give high levels of individual support and well-informed feedback, which aids progress and encourages the students and raises their level of motivation. Good behaviour and concentration by the majority of students, and their positive attitudes to the subject, add to the effect of good teaching and ensure that achievement is good in all years.
140. The leadership of the department is good and it is managed well. The department development plan has appropriate priorities linked to raising attainment further. The assessment system is good and target setting is in place for all students. This includes the ongoing review of targets as student progress through the project being undertaken. Good use is made of data and the analysis of results. This has led to a range of initiatives to further raise attainment and these are contributing to the improvement in standards seen, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is very good and new courses in catering and engineering have been introduced into Year 10 to broaden choices and to better meet the aspirations of the students. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is narrower, with no modules of work in textiles, and food technology limited to Years 7 and 9. In addition, insufficient attention is given to the progressive and systematic development of design and graphical skills in these years. The accommodation and staffing are good and the technicians are effectively deployed to support the delivery of the curriculum. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Attainment is at a similar level but improving, and teaching and achievement continue to be good in all years.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design and music were the focus subjects; drama was sampled.

141. GCSE **drama** results in 2004 were well above average, the proportion at grades A*-C exceeding the national average by 20 per cent. One Year 11 lesson was observed. Teaching and learning were very good, students made very good progress and standards observed were well above average. The lesson was characterized by high expectations from a highly skilled subject specialist and students who continuously endeavoured to raise their standards. There is currently no drama group in Year 10, an outcome of drama no longer being taught during Year 9, when students make choices for GCSE work. Ways of helping the subject to receive better support during Year 9

are needed, given its effectiveness in securing very good achievement and outcomes at GCSE. The subject leader is inspirational. The curriculum is planned very well, providing good coverage of performance and technical skills. There are good assessment procedures. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good: they include annual productions; a performing arts club and a theatre company.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are above the national average as a result of good teaching.
- Achievement across all year groups is good as a result of good teaching and learning.
- Teachers provide a highly supportive “coaching” approach to teaching, which motivates students and personalises learning.
- Students identify personal targets for improvement as a result of good assessment.
- An improving curriculum is the result of good self-evaluation.
- There are too few opportunities for students to use ICT in art and design.
- The highest attaining students are not challenged enough.

Commentary

142. GCSE results in 2004 were above the national average. Results show a steady upward trend since the previous inspection.
143. In the work seen, overall standards in Year 9 are average, but a small proportion is above average. All students achieve well, including those with special educational needs when account is taken of their attainment level in art on entry into the school. This is because students make good gains in skills and knowledge in art and design as they progress through the school. As a result of effective teaching, students have a vigorous and skilful approach to drawing and colour, which gives them the confidence to develop their own ideas and experiment with a range of media. This is shown in Year 9, where students apply tone and colour to their work on natural forms very effectively. Students refer productively to the work of artists and have a balanced experience in both two- and three-dimensional media. Planning and preparation for class projects are meticulous and enable students to make good progress.
144. Standards in the work seen in Year 11 are above average and reflect steadily rising overall attainment each year. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and individual coaching, which focuses on the setting of assessment-based personal targets. This enables students to develop individual ideas and to realise them in a wide choice of media. Students have substantial knowledge and understanding of art history, terms and concepts, which they discuss with insight and apply to their own work. Overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 is based on the highly individualised work of every student. Whilst most students make good progress, the low incidence of A and A* grades and the standard of work seen reveal insufficient challenge for some of the most talented to attain their full potential.
145. The quality of teaching and learning is good. At times it is very good. This is because teachers provide very effective targeted personal mentoring and offer additional after-school support. Teachers know their students very well and are respected for their subject expertise and technical knowledge. As a result, students are motivated and enjoy art and design lessons,

learn quickly, grasp key concepts and acquire difficult skills successfully. A carefully planned scheme of study with clear learning objectives enables students to make continuous progress year after year. Target setting linked to assessment is embedded in teaching and forms the subject of a continuous dialogue between the teachers and individual students. The curriculum enables students to develop spiritual and cultural dimensions as the personalised nature of learning stimulates heightened self-awareness through the exploration of the visual senses and development of expressive skills. There are, however, very few opportunities for them to work using digital media, which are integral both to learning and professional practice in art and design.

146. The department is led and managed well by a cohesive team of two experienced teachers. They have a clear and practical vision for art and design, which has produced a sound, developing and continually revised scheme of work, which is designed to respond sensitively to students' learning needs. This ensures depth, variety and progression, allowing students to make good progress both within lessons and over time. This has raised achievement across all year groups and improved the quality of teaching and learning. Art and design has reflective leadership, which has created a very good habit of self-evaluation. Resources, apart from ICT, are satisfactory and good artists' materials are frequently used. Monitoring, target setting and assessment are carried out with care and diligence and the value added to each student's achievement is carefully monitored.
147. There has been a good level of improvement since the previous inspection. This includes improvements in achievement across all Years 7 to 11, particularly in GCSE results, and in the sixth form. The most significant improvements have been in target setting and motivating forms of assessment that build confidence and self-esteem in all students. There has, however, been no effective response to the recommendation on ICT provision.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning, and very good attitudes by the students lead to them achieving well by Year 9 from a low starting point in Year 7.
- Music students achieve well on the expressive arts course in Years 10 and 11.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Excellent extra-curricular opportunities enable students of all abilities to develop fully their musical skills.
- The lack of useable computer facilities is a barrier to learning in the main teaching room.

Commentary

148. Numbers taking the 2004 GCSE music examinations were too small to make comparisons with the national average; students entered achieved the highest grades. In the same year, 70 per cent of a large group of students on the expressive arts course, many with music as their main art form, gained A*-C results. Both sets of results were an improvement upon the previous year. Earlier teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 showed these students to be gaining just below average standards, demonstrating very good achievement.

149. In Year 9, students are achieving well, gaining just below average standards, reflecting the school's own assessment. In Year 8 they have started to thoroughly learn composition techniques, being able to write and improvise 12-bar blues sequences with appropriate chords and correct use of the blues scale. By Year 9, students write creative work that has good shape and balance and a sensitive use of sound textures. They can perform these compositions with a fine sense of coordination, demonstrating, in many cases, a real feeling for musicianship.
150. In Years 10 and 11, music students on the expressive arts course are achieving well, gaining at least average standards. They are targeted to gain above average results at the end of their course. Scrutiny of work and discussion with the students demonstrate that they are on line to reach those standards. Very talented musicians in both years have very high standards of performance. An excellent guitarist in Year 10, for example, is given many opportunities to demonstrate his virtuosity in the school and wider community. In Year 11, students choosing music as one of the two art forms, in preparation for the examination, have above average standards of practical performance, and very competent mastery of computers. They use these effectively in preparing creative compositions for the examination.
151. Teaching and learning are very good. The music staff work together highly effectively as a team, giving maximum opportunities to all students, and especially to the many very talented students in the school. Good provision is made for lower attaining students to achieve well through appropriate tasks in practical work. Members of the department have very high expectations, very good subject knowledge, and individual strengths that complement each other. Very good analysis is made of available data in order to set targets, both for individual students and for the whole department. Assessment procedures are thorough. Students have very good attitudes to the subject, and the many talented students have excellent attitudes. This is largely because teachers take a personal interest in students of all abilities.
152. Leadership and management are very good. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Students continue to achieve well and teaching and learning are very good. Talented musicians achieve very well. Excellent provision is made for the very able and motivated musicians in the school and they are fully extended through extra-curricular activities. The music suite is humming with activity from 7.30 each morning until the end of the day, including during non-contact times. These opportunities, together with extra-curricular provision for theory classes and classes for developing students' aural skills, fully extend the more able musicians. They benefit from the links with the community, which are very strong. The management of the ICT facilities in the department is a weakness that has not been addressed successfully by the school. It is a barrier to further learning that new computers, which have been in the in the main teaching room for a long time, have never operated, and were unusable during the inspection. Although there is insufficient take-up by students to follow a GCSE music course, the expressive arts GCSE course attracts large numbers of boys and girls, and is an appropriate course for the needs of the students.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students in Years 7 to 9 achieve well and make good progress because teaching is good.

- Leadership and management are good, and the school's specialist status is helping to widen students' experiences and opportunities for accreditation and leadership.
- Extra-curricular provision is a very strong feature and is helping to raise standards.
- Progress in GCSE is hindered by a lack of a suitable base for theory work, and by marking that is not helpful enough in guiding students towards improvement.

Commentary

153. GCSE results in both 2003 and 2004 were average – all candidates successfully completed the course, with just over half gaining A*-C grades. These results represent satisfactory achievement for the students concerned. The course is popular with boys, although take-up by girls is low. Many students achieved higher results in physical education than in their other GCSE subjects.
154. When students join the school in Year 7 they have a wide range of capability and experience in physical education, and standards are below average overall. Throughout Years 7 to 9, boys and girls of all backgrounds, including those having special educational needs, achieve well. They make good progress because enthusiastic teaching reinforces their positive attitudes towards the subject. At this stage, progress is good in swimming, where standards are above average; progress is also good in health-related-fitness work, although much slower in gymnastics. In Year 9, overall standards are average, and confirm teachers' assessments of their students' performance.
155. In Years 10 and 11, it was only possible to observe Year 10 National Curriculum physical education lessons, where practical standards are broadly average. A recent positive innovation has been the introduction of opportunities for all students in Years 10 and 11 to gain accreditation within their National Curriculum physical education lessons, either through the Junior Sports Leader Award scheme or by taking a short course GCSE in the subject. This has had positive impact on student participation – however, in a Year 10 short course lesson observed, standards were below average and, despite satisfactory teaching, students were not well motivated and underachieved. This is not the case in the optional full GCSE physical education course, where standards are average overall, although stronger in practical work. Students generally show good commitment to their GCSE studies and are achieving satisfactorily. Throughout Years 10 and 11, students make satisfactory progress and their overall standards across the full range of physical education activities are average.
156. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, and is good in Years 7 to 9. Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and hardworking and have clear expectations of their students. Relationships are good and students respond well to the positive manner in which they are taught. Behaviour and participation rates are good, and this ensures good continuity in learning. When activities are challenging and varied, students quickly learn appropriate techniques and improve their performance, as in a Year 8 swimming lesson, where boys and girls of all abilities made good progress in developing both front crawl and breaststroke. In the most effective lessons, teachers share clear learning objectives so that students understand what they are learning and why; they frequently focus questions well to ensure students recognise key features of performance and this helps them to extend their knowledge and understanding. In this way, all students, including those with special educational needs and those with higher ability, achieve well because they are properly stretched by challenging tasks. This was illustrated well in a successful Year 11 GCSE practical lesson where boys made good progress in analysing basic attacking principles in basketball because they were consistently challenged to explain their views and understanding. Not all lessons are as effective – whilst teaching is consistently satisfactory or

better, some lessons are slow to get underway; others do not provide work that is sufficiently matched to the wide range of needs in some groups. The checking and marking of GCSE theory work are varied and provide too little guidance for improvement.

157. The department is led and managed well. There is a positive momentum arising from the school's recent designation as a specialist Sports College, with a range of positive curricular innovations that are raising standards and increasing students' motivation and interest. These include good opportunities for accreditation and leadership. The curriculum is broad, but aesthetic opportunities are limited. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good, reflecting the strong commitment of staff to their roles, and they are popular with boys and girls. Links with the community, and with local clubs and schools, are developing well. As a result, the department is providing at least two hours of quality physical education for almost all its students each week, with a positive impact on standards and achievement. Much needed improvement to facilities is underway, with the present gymnasium being in poor condition and contrasting sharply with the good quality tennis provision. The lack of a suitable dedicated base for theory work is a disadvantage to GCSE development. Documentation, planning, and the improved assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are good, and systems for monitoring subject and teacher performance are in place. Since the last inspection, examination results have also improved, and overall progress has been good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The focus subject was citizenship; personal social and health education (PSHE) was sampled.

158. The **PSHE** programme prepares students well for adult life. It includes lessons in careers, health, sex and relationships and drug education. It is taught within the guidance programme and supplemented in assemblies, registration time and in other subjects such as child care, health and social care, religious education and science. It makes good use of outside agencies, such as Connexions, to enhance learning and achievement. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some very good teaching and some that is unsatisfactory. Learning and achievement are satisfactory. Students value careers education, especially preparation for option choice and the well-organised programme of work experience in Year 10. They find it helpful in making informed choices throughout their school life and when they leave the school. Students are given good and impartial advice on post-16 options.
159. Guidance lessons were observed in all Years 7, 8 and 9. Year 7 learnt effectively about the problems associated with different types of bullying and where students can go for help. Year 8 students used their knowledge of foods related to religions to learn about social eating and eating disorders. The Year 9 lesson was an introduction to option choices in Year 10 using a useful "Courses for You" pack. Registration and assemblies concentrate on expanding the theme for the week. Where tutors use this well, it contributes positively to students' personal development, but it is not used consistently and too often registration time is wasted.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is very good, with very successful strategies having been used to introduce and consolidate the subject in the school.
- Links with the community are very good.

- Citizenship contributes very positively to students' spiritual, moral and social development.
- Development of active citizenship through extra-curricular opportunities is very good.
- Monitoring of teaching in the department is under-developed.
- The inclusion of aspects of citizenship within all subject areas is under-developed.

Commentary

160. Citizenship, together with careers and PSHE, forms the guidance department. All students from Years 7 to 11 take a guidance lesson once a week. Citizenship programmes were introduced very carefully, and new developments were thoroughly monitored and evaluated as they came on stream. The school is well ahead in promoting citizenship as an important feature of the curriculum. Curriculum areas identify where they are including aspects of citizenship into their schemes of work. A citizenship GCSE short course is started towards the end of Year 9, and is completed at the end of Year 11. Two pilot groups, comprising fifty students in the current Year 11, are targeted to gain up to 65 per cent A*-C grades. During the inspection, six discrete citizenship lessons were observed.
161. In Year 9, students achieve satisfactorily, gaining average standards in response to overall satisfactory teaching. In Year 7 they are developing an all-round awareness of what it is to live in the home, school and local community environment. In a lesson observed, they made perceptive comments about how bullies should be treated in society. Year 8 students have a clear understanding about how the media influences and manipulates young people's thinking, especially with regard to diet and diseases such as anorexia, bulimia and obesity. By the end of Year 9, students have successfully studied more global issues, and have started preparing for the GCSE Citizenship examination.
162. In Year 11, students achieve well, gaining average standards in response to overall good teaching. Year 10 students are aware of the differences between community and neighbourhood. They appreciate the values of family life and of the role of friends in their own lives. A group of Year 10 students on the ASDAN work-related learning course interacted well, and led a good quality discussion about environmental issues following a recent visit to Sellafield nuclear power station. Year 11 students are developing an awareness of team participation and relationships as preparation for their forthcoming examination. In one lesson, they developed a well-balanced discussion concerning the extent to which the individual can influence a group. Overall, students have good attitudes to citizenship across all years.
163. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. During the inspection there was some unsatisfactory teaching in one lesson, where too much time was spent trying to control poor behaviour by a small number of boys. Teachers have sought to give themselves secure knowledge in a subject which is not their area of expertise. Very good individual lesson plans have been prepared by the citizenship coordinator for use in all lessons across all years. These are fully detailed, and are very helpful for the subject teachers. Lessons are well structured and an effective use is made of resources. Teachers successfully make students think for themselves. Assessment procedures are good, because much work has been done by the coordinator to establish clear levels of attainment. Where homework is set, it is relevant and extends what students have covered in lessons.

164. Leadership is very good and management is good overall. The citizenship coordinator has made a success of introducing the subject into the school. Short and long term strategic planning is very good, ensuring that the subject is given due consideration in terms of overall curriculum planning. There is very good use of data analysis. Management is good overall, but the monitoring of teaching is under-developed. The inclusion of aspects of citizenship within all subject areas, as a support to aspects taught within the discrete citizenship lessons, is also under-developed.
165. The department puts great emphasis upon active citizenship, and contributes very positively to the spiritual, moral and social development of students. This is very effective in raising students' awareness of their responsibilities within the school and local community. Those students who commit themselves to active citizenship are awarded a specific Certificate of Achievement. Older students take advantage of the numerous opportunities offered to them to take responsibility. Links with the local community are a strength of the school, and students have a good record for raising money for charity.

OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Five courses were sampled. Standards in work seen were below average overall and well below average on some courses. Attitudes were good overall and in some cases very good.

166. Teaching and learning were very good in a Year 10 **Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)** lesson. Students confidently engaged in a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of working for a local major employer following a site visit. Standards were well below average. Students' attitudes were very good because of the skilful management of discussion. All were involved and felt confident with the subject matter and were able to identify skills needed in the workplace.
167. Teaching and learning were satisfactory in a Year 10 **child care** lesson. Students investigated different food items from the point of view of safe storage requirements. Relationships were good and resources well organised. A variety of tasks maintained students' interest but discussion was not always effective in challenging and promoting understanding.
168. Teaching and learning were good in a Year 10 lesson on **job seeking skills**. Resources including music and photographs were well used as an introduction to emotional awareness. Students worked well in pairs and groups to explore emotions. Methods were effective in developing confidence and self-esteem as part of personal development.
169. Teaching and learning were satisfactory in a Year 11 **health and social care** lesson. Students displayed positive attitudes. They worked productively, engaging in a discussion about the personal development of babies and young children. Their responses were well used and good awareness of their understanding ensured that points requiring explanation were dealt with. Opportunities to develop independent learning skills were limited.
170. Teaching and learning were good in a Year 11 **work-related learning** lesson. The small group of students attended a board meeting of their "company", which was involved in the marketing and manufacture of bird boxes. They engaged in a discussion about profit margins and quality control as well as gaining practical

experience of the manufacturing process. Imaginative teaching methods produced good motivation and interest.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2004.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	4	100.0	78.3	0.0	21.6	22.5	28.5
Biology	6	66.7	63.5	0.0	10.4	13.3	19.8
Chemistry	2	50.0	70.3	0.0	13.2	10.0	23.0
Design and technology	2	50.0	72.6	50.0	13.9	25.0	24.3
English/English language	2	100.0	85.3	0.0	16.1	25.0	29.0
General studies	5	80.0	73.6	20.0	16.9	26.0	25.5
Geography	2	50.0	75.5	0.0	20.4	20.0	27.0
History	1	100.0	82.2	0.0	20.8	20.0	29.2
Mathematics	3	33.3	59.9	0.0	14.1	6.7	20.5
Other Social Studies	3	33.3	67.8	0.0	15.1	6.7	23.2
Religious studies	3	66.7	82.2	0.0	26.1	26.7	31.2
Sports/PE Studies	2	100.0	72.2	0.0	11.8	20.0	22.8

Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	4	100	98.3	0.0	50.2	45.0	87.1
Biology	5	80.0	96.6	40.0	40.0	64.0	79.3
Chemistry	1	100	97.7	0.0	50.0	60.0	85.7
Design and technology	1	100	97.8	100	35.0	120.0	77.9
English/English language	9	100	99.2	22.2	36.4	73.3	81.1
General studies	2	100	94.9	50.0	30.5	80.0	72.9
Geography	7	100	98.8	14.3	46.4	82.9	85.2
History	5	100	99.0	0.0	45.6	60.0	85.1
Mathematics	1	100	96.8	0.0	56.6	40.0	89.5
Other Social Studies	7	85.7	97.4	0.0	42.5	51.4	81.6
Religious studies	8	100	99.1	37.5	49.5	82.5	87.4
Sports/PE studies	5	100	97.8	0.0	30.9	72.0	75.4

VCE attainment summary

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	6	100	91.6	33.3	24.1	83.3	67.9
Health and Social Care	6	90.9	93.5	18.2	24.9	72.7	70.0
Performing arts	8	100	n/a	62.5	n/a	100	n/a
Travel and tourism	3	100	n/a	0	n/a	66.7	n/a

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was English literature.

English literature

The provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attitudes are very positive and they show a great enthusiasm for the subject.
- Teaching and learning are good, resulting in good achievement.
- The provision is well organised and led.
- There needs to be a sharper focus on teaching students what makes successful assignment writing at this level.

Commentary

171. Because the department has varied its course between English literature and English language, there were no A-level candidates in 2004. A-level results were below average in 2003 and average in 2002. The AS English literature results in 2004 were above average. The students did better than expected. Recruitment, within the limitations of a below average size sixth form, is good and retention satisfactory.
172. Standards in Year 13 and Year 12 are above average. Achievement is good in each year. Higher attainers write highly analytical assignments. They support their opinions well with very detailed references to the texts. They focus sharply on the impact of language when making their interpretations. There is not a great range of attainment. However, students not reaching the higher standards produce work that is not consistently analytical and/or evaluative. They tend to paraphrase too much. Students of all attainments have a secure grasp of the themes, issues and socio-historical contexts of the literature they study. Achievement in terms of developing independent learning and research strategies is very good. Year 13 students used ICT and other sources well to research classical allusions in Keats' poetry. Their presentations, during a very good lesson, of character analyses of Othello and Iago would have done credit to a higher education institution. Year 12 students showed equally resourceful thinking and methods when analysing the function of the genre of letters in "Enduring Love." These positive attitudes are consistently apparent during lessons: all students spontaneously make frequent spoken contributions on their own initiative.
173. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the course, assessment requirements and texts. Their own enthusiasm and delight in literature stimulate the students' enjoyment. Expectations are high, as evidenced by the frequent opportunities for independent work. Lessons are usually lively with students confidently responding directly to each other. They clearly feel secure and are encouraged to offer their views and to support them. These contributions reveal insights that are at a higher level than suggested by examination and assignment grades. Students need to have a more consistently taught focus on the conventions of assignment writing at this level, both during term time and for examinations. There are some very good features in assessment such as close analysis of essays, but this very good practice is not fully embedded. Good use is made of ICT and standards are average.
174. Both leadership and management are good. The teaching is shared among experienced teachers. There is good use of information about prior attainment to help set targets. Progress towards these targets is monitored carefully. Evaluation of results is also good. Standards are higher than at the time of the last inspection: improvement since then has been good.

MATHEMATICS

The focus of the inspection was mathematics.

Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well below average in Year 13 and achievement is poor.
- In Year 13, teaching is unsatisfactory and not sufficiently rigorous to help students learn new concepts.
- Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory and are not used effectively to help students learn.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

175. In 2004 standards in both AS and A-level examinations were well below average and achievement was poor. Too many students failed to gain an acceptable grade in either examination, or failed to complete the course.
176. Students in Year 13 entered Year 12 with standards that were just below average, taking into account GCSE grades on entry. Modular test results show that achievement is poor for the majority of students in all aspects of mathematics and only those with the highest attainment reach a pass grade in examinations. Too many students obtain lower grades the second time they take a module than at their first attempt, reflecting insufficient guidance on how to improve. The earlier standards of some students do not equip them sufficiently for the demands of the course at A-level. Students in Year 12 began the course with average skills and are achieving satisfactorily because teaching overall is better.
177. Teaching in individual lessons seen was satisfactory but, based on all the evidence available, teaching overall is unsatisfactory. It is satisfactory in Year 12 and unsatisfactory in Year 13. In the most effective lesson seen there was a suitable balance between teacher input and independent work and illustrations were practical and relevant. Concepts were explained carefully, demonstrating good subject expertise. Students were confident, challenging the teacher and asking for further explanations. In lessons where teaching was least effective, students worked through exercises at their own pace, supported by the teacher. Students showed little enthusiasm for the subject. Teacher exposition and whole class discussion were minimal. Linked to this, homework is not marked well enough to give students clear guidance on how to improve, or to provide a basis for revision.
178. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory because not enough has been done to identify the reasons for unsatisfactory examination results over recent years, or to improve provision. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. There is a lack of suitable documentation to support learning. Assessment, marking and record keeping, including the tracking of students' learning and setting clear and specific mathematical targets for learning, are unsatisfactory.

SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was physics. **Chemistry** and **biology** were sampled. One Year 12 chemistry lesson and one Year 13 biology lesson were observed. Standards in these lessons were below average, but teaching, learning and achievement were satisfactory, with students attaining the standards that would be expected on the basis of their past results.

Physics

Provision in physics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the past have been below expectations, partly due to staffing difficulties that are now resolved, so achievement has improved and is now satisfactory.
- There is good teamwork between the teachers jointly responsible for the subject and as a result the course is well planned and organised.
- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons that meet the needs of most students well, although some teaching does not challenge students' thinking enough.
- Students work conscientiously and have good relationships with their teachers but they do not take enough responsibility for their own learning, resulting in below average independent learning skills.

Commentary

179. There was no A-level course in 2004. The AS-level course did not have enough students to make national comparisons valid, but all the students achieved lower grades than predicted. The 2003 A-level results were well below average, both at the higher grades and overall, although the proportion of male students reaching higher grades was above average. Despite considerable staffing difficulties that have affected standards in the past, satisfactory teaching enabled all the students to achieve at least a pass grade in the 2003 A-level examinations.
180. Standards seen on the inspection are below average overall, although work seen in lessons in Year 13 is average, with some above average work from the highest attaining students. Year 12 students entered the course with results that were below those normally required for A-level courses but their achievement is satisfactory. Year 13 students had higher GCSE grades on entry to the course and their achievement is also satisfactory. Students in both years have satisfactory recall of work they have done previously, although Year 12 students need considerable prompting and are not as willing to offer their own ideas in discussion work. Students in both years have appropriate practical skills for the work they undertake but Year 12 students have a below average understanding of the significance of errors in measurement and the steps taken to minimise these. Skills in ICT and mathematics are sufficient for the work covered but communication skills are below average and the students' grasp of scientific vocabulary and their ability to discuss, explain and predict from their existing knowledge is below that normally found on A-level courses.
181. Standards and achievement in the past have been affected by staffing difficulties that resulted in some use of teachers inexperienced in teaching the subject at this level, but these problems have now been resolved. This has led to higher standards in Year 13 than were apparent in the 2004 AS results.
182. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with good teaching seen in Year 13. This secures satisfactory learning and achievement overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and they plan work carefully to make lessons interesting and relevant to the students' experience. They use ICT and practical work well to add variety to the teaching, as in Year 13 lessons on electronics that were delivered effectively by different teachers, using methods that engaged the students' interest. Teachers make the most of small group sizes and work is carefully structured to help lower attaining students grasp the ideas involved. The students respond by working conscientiously and behaving well, although they tend to be passive learners. Their reluctance to ask

searching questions and contribute to lively discussion means that teaching does not always stretch them sufficiently.

183. Leadership of the subject is good and there is a clear vision regarding its development. Management is satisfactory. Teamwork and day-to-day organisation of the subject are good and students' progress is regularly monitored through routine tests and assessments. As a result, students enjoy the course and have positive attitudes to learning, with most students completing the course and going on to higher education. Weaknesses in the students' performance are identified through the assessment process, but action to tackle under-achievement is not always taken early enough, so that some students have not achieved their predicted grades in the past. Whilst students are positive about the course, numbers choosing the subject are low and were insufficient to run an A-level course last year. The subject was not reported at the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on religious studies. One Year 13 GCE A-level lesson and one Year 12 lesson were sampled in **geography**. In the Year 13 lesson, standards were well above average. Teaching and learning were very good and students showed very good attitudes. In the Year 12 lesson, standards were broadly average; good teaching enabled students to make good progress with their learning. The teacher demonstrated good subject knowledge and used this well to engage students in their learning.

Religious studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well because they are very well taught and have very positive attitudes.
- Teachers have a very secure knowledge of the subject, which they use very effectively to help students learn.
- Very good leadership and management ensure the subject is highly successful in recruiting and retaining students on the course.
- Students are not challenged enough to undertake their own research and information gathering.

Commentary

184. In the A-level examinations in 2004, results were average. All students entered gained a pass grade and students did better in religious studies than in their other subjects. There were no A grades but the proportion of B grades was above average. Results were similar in 2003. Results at AS level in 2003 were below average, reflecting the staffing difficulties of that year. Previous years' results were average.

185. Standards are currently average in both Year 12 and Year 13. In Year 12 students show a good understanding of the diversity of views: for example, whether the existence of evil is compatible with the notion of a benevolent God. They can link their own opinions on these issues to those of philosophers such as Augustine. Their writing, whilst generally accurate and relevant, does not offer enough examples of independent thought and research. In Year 13, students show a good grasp of philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas. They understand Hume's four arguments against the notion of miracles. They can compare and

evaluate the views of scholars and different schools of thought; for example, Hick's arguments in relation to creation theory and belief in life after death. Their research skills and independent thinking skills are again below average. This particular group of students' attainment on entry to the course was well below average and their achievement in reaching average standards is very good.

186. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. The subject is taught with a thoroughness that ensures students cover the course requirements, learn new skills and acquire an impressive body of knowledge and understanding of religious issues. This is largely due to the very good subject knowledge that teachers bring to the subject, which enables them to use methods that students find interesting and motivating. Expectations of what students can achieve are very high. Challenging targets are set and reviewed at regular intervals so that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Teachers do not encourage students sufficiently to find things out for themselves and to develop their independent research skills through, for example, greater use of the Internet. Students' attitudes are very good and the application they bring to their work contributes to their very good learning.
187. The subject is very well led and managed. Numbers choosing to take the subject are rising rapidly and retention rates are very good. There is a strong focus on improving results. Target setting is in place and is helping students know what they have to do to achieve the highest attainable grade. Very good support is available to students beyond lessons. The recent visit to New York to take part in a seminar about relationships between the different faith communities in that city was very successful in broadening students' horizons. The annual religious studies conference held locally provides opportunities for discussion and debate. This is a new subject since the time of the previous inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Drama was sampled. During a Year 12 lesson, students learned very well, working at a well above average level. The course has recruited well – fifteen students – and this reflects the very good teaching observed.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was physical education.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students at all levels of prior attainment achieve expected results.
- The subject is led well, and the specialist status recently obtained is leading to greater opportunities in the subject for students and improved facilities.
- Teachers support students well, but should encourage them to take greater personal responsibility for their learning.
- The department lacks a suitable base for theory work.

Commentary

188. Results in both AS and A-level examinations in physical education were average in 2004. When compared with their GCSE starting points, students gained the expected

results and, overall, their achievement was satisfactory. Course completion rates are good; the subject is a popular choice with male students. However, in 2004 there was no significant difference between the performance of male and female students.

189. Standards seen during the inspection are average in both Years 12 and 13, and reflect satisfactory achievement for the students concerned. The open-access policy operated by the school results in a wide range of students' prior attainment in GCSE, and includes several with relatively modest ability for the demands of A-level work. They are well motivated and committed to their studies, and progress overall is satisfactory.
190. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and ensures that students learn effectively. Teachers have a growing awareness of the demands of the course and use their subject knowledge effectively to promote students' understanding. Relationships are good and students are well supported and encouraged. However, their passive response - for example, in a Year 12 lesson exploring factors affecting motivation and performance - is indicative of the need for greater emphasis on students' independent learning and personal responsibility. Where this is the case, and where appropriate demands are made for their active participation, teaching is more effective and learning is more secure. This was illustrated clearly in a successful Year 13 lesson on energy systems, where students made good progress in understanding the impact of supplements and stimulants on athletic performance.
191. Leadership is good and the subject is managed satisfactorily. There is a clear vision for the development of the subject that is reflected in the school having recently gained specialist Sports College status, and this has added impetus to the work at sixth form level. A variety of new courses have been introduced and these provide wider opportunities for students of all levels of capability, and encourage greater involvement by female students. The lack of a suitable dedicated base for theory work is a barrier to progress in A-level work. The marking of students' work lacks a sharp focus on what students need to do to improve further. The absence of recreational opportunity within the sixth form curriculum is disappointing, although there are good extra-curricular opportunities. The take-up for leadership courses, for example, through the Community Sports Leader Award scheme or the Duke of Edinburgh Award, is good, and there are opportunities for sixth form students to help younger students with their physical education, both here and in local primary schools. Overall, improvement since the last inspection is good, and is underpinned by improved examination results.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was business studies.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of their very positive attitudes and good teaching.
- Achievement is good among students from a variety of starting points because the curriculum is well matched to a wide range of needs.
- Careful lesson planning ensures that students are prepared well to meet course requirements.

- Planning priorities lack focus on how to improve the quality of provision offered by the subject.
- The limitations in the links with other schools and local businesses mean that opportunities to share good practice and instigate investigative work are under-developed.

Commentary

192. AVCE results in 2004 from a small entry of students were well above average. Students' achievement was good. In the previous year results were very high, again from a small entry.
193. In Year 13 standards are above average, and in Year 12 they are broadly average. The achievement of both current Year 12 and Year 13 students is good when account is taken of their starting points, which were lower than groups in the previous two years. Investigation and research are strong features of students' work. ICT is used well. In both Year 12 and Year 13 there is a strong sense of "real world" knowledge in students' writing, due in part to direct contact with some local companies. Year 13 students have each chosen products, looked carefully at the competition and then devised their own version prior to launching a marketing strategy. They show good originality of thought with some using expertise from their leisure pursuits to design their products. They apply theory to real business situations, for example in identifying the management style of a chosen business. The balance and blend of theory and practice in portfolio assignments are weaker in the case of lower attainers. Students use evaluation in their investigations, for example in considering alternative methods for controlling quality in a local business. Evaluation is another weaker area for lower attainers.
194. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching has a "real world" emphasis, due in part to good planning that incorporates site visits and outside speakers. This in turn results in students naturally speaking and writing about the business world around them, although this in-depth "real world" knowledge of business is limited in its range. The subject is made relevant and students respond with very positive attitudes. Teaching is matched well to course requirements so that students know what they have to do to meet grade criteria in portfolio assignments. ICT is used well as a routine means of summarising key points for learning and this helps students in making their own notes of relevant points raised in discussion. Challenge is good overall, with well-planned sequences of lessons that give students a good foundation for enhancing the quality of their portfolio assignments. Class discussion sometimes lacks sufficient pace and challenge. Higher-level literacy skills that score higher marks need more routine emphasis within the teaching. Assessment and monitoring procedures clearly show students how far they have reached as the course progresses.
195. Leadership is good. Momentum and direction have been sustained during a period of significant change. Students have achieved well in each year since the introduction of a new course whilst, at the same time, there have been significant changes in staffing. Management is good. The introduction and development of a new course have been well managed. The curriculum has been well planned to include links with the real business world although the range of these links is limited. Planning overall lacks focus on how to improve quality. Sharing good practice with other schools would assist further development in what is effectively a single person department. There was no separate business studies report at the last inspection.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

196. **General studies** provision was sampled. One Year 12 general studies lesson on the subject of government and politics was observed during the inspection. Teaching and learning were good and the teacher worked effectively to help the students to develop an understanding of local and national politics. Students' interest varied but most gained a good understanding of how they should be involved in the political decision-making process. Students made good progress in the lesson, but their understanding of politics and political systems was below average.

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

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