

INSPECTION REPORT

Hedingham School

Sible Hedingham

Essex County Council

Unique reference number: 115209

Headteacher: Susan Anderson

Lead inspector: Graham Preston

Dates of inspection: 10th – 13th November 2003

Inspection number: 259174

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1086
School address:	Yeldham Road Sible Hedingham Halstead
Postcode:	CO9 3QH
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Appropriate authority:	Essex LEA
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Miles Scrivens
Date of previous inspection:	10.11.97

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Hedingham is a mixed rural comprehensive school with a sixth form in north Essex. It is an increasingly popular school and with a roll of nearly 1100 it is larger than average and currently oversubscribed. It provides for a largely rural area and about 70 per cent of students arrive by school bus. Almost all students are designated white British and those from other ethnic backgrounds or other significant groups such as refugees or travellers, are almost entirely absent. Many students live in isolated villages and although there are fast growing urban area to the south of the school, for most the school is still their main social and well as learning centre. The school takes the full range of students in terms of social backgrounds and students are broadly average in terms of their academic attainment on entry. The proportion of students judged to have special educational needs is below national average as is the number with specific statements though this tends to understate those, particularly boys, in need of additional support for basic literacy skills.

The school includes a successful and increasingly rare school farm and has good links with local agricultural colleges enabling students to progress to higher level vocational courses. The smaller than average, although cost-effective, sixth form meets local needs and the school has very good and developing networks with other schools and colleges that enhance local educational provision. Hedingham has applied to be a specialist college for mathematics and ICT and is awaiting assessment.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1990	Graham Preston	Lead inspector	Health and social care 11-16
1112	Peter Oldfield	Lay inspector	
30648	Brian Skelton	Team inspector	English 11-16
13067	Adrian Quinn	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-16
20420	Stuart Rawcliffe	Team inspector	Science, Biology post 16
8216	Geoffrey Binks	Team inspector	English Post 16
7926	James Bowden	Team inspector	Physical education
14490	Susan Jackson	Team inspector	History, sixth form co-ordinator
10288	John Richards	Team inspector	Art and design
2183	Peter Thompson	Team inspector	Design and technology
17404	Judith Tolley	Team inspector	French, German
18787	David Wright	Team inspector	Geography
11672	Peter Harle	Team inspector	Music, Drama
1723	Michael Milton	Team inspector	Religious education, citizenship
4615	Michael Bostock	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
10060	David Gutmann	Team inspector	Health and social care post 16
30699	Arthur Kemp	Team inspector	Mathematics post 16
18463	Colin Lower	Team inspector	Psychology post 16

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Hedingham is a well regarded and oversubscribed school that has increased its roll considerably and at nearly 1100 students is now larger than average. It provides a good education for its students who are drawn from a wide and largely rural area. Standards in the school are above national average and most students achieve well in their examination courses. Students enjoy being in a school where they are well taught and supported. The school provides a strong focus for the local community and runs a highly successful school farm. The school is very well led and provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Educational standards that have improved considerably in recent years and are above national average
- Very good leadership of the headteacher supported by a strong and cohesive senior management team
- Consistently good teaching in most subject areas by the dedicated school staff
- Significant improvements in monitoring and assessing student progress
- A caring and supportive pastoral care system contributing to a positive learning environment
- Very good links with local schools, colleges and abroad
- Literacy development which is lacking in some areas and inhibiting the achievement of some students particularly boys
- The recent lack of curriculum planning and implementation for citizenship and ICT.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection in improving teaching quality and assessment practice. Much of this can be attributed to the very good monitoring and development that now takes place. Particular subjects such as art, music, mathematics and science and modern foreign languages have shown significant improvement and while ICT has improved too, the current lack of subject leadership is hindering growth.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

The overall standard of achievement is good

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	B	B	B	B
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 pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

The above table shows that Year 11 students in the school attain above average results when compared with all schools and schools with similar student attainment at the end of Year 9. Overall achievement is good in all years. Girls do significantly better than boys in the end of Year 9 tests and at GCSE. Both do better than respectively girls and boys nationally. Part of the reason for girls' better performance is their greater effort and more secure literacy skills. Students make good progress in mathematics and science in all years. Standards in both have improved and are above national average. Students make satisfactory progress in English and reach standards in reading and writing in line with those nationally at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE. Even so, there are a significant number of students, often boys, with weaker than expected literacy skills when compared with standards reached in other areas. Students acquire secure ICT knowledge and skills in Years 7-9 and those that continue their studies to GCSE make good progress. Students often excel in their chosen GCSE courses such as art, drama, design and technology, French, German and geography. Overall GCSE standards rose in 2003 and this trend looks to continue based on current

achievement of students in Year 11. Although most recent A-level standards have been a little below national average, current standards are closer to those nationally and show sixth form students are achieving well in their chosen courses.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good

Students are well supported by the care and guidance systems. They are provided with appropriate academic and vocational course options in Years 10-11 and a good range of courses in the sixth form. The school provides good opportunities for students to take responsibility and develop their personal and social skills through the School Council and other activities though some of the taught courses contributing to such development such as PSHE and citizenship are less well implemented.

Teaching and learning are good

During the inspection three quarters of teaching was good or better and only a very small percentage was unsatisfactory. One of the main strengths includes the teachers' specialist knowledge that helps students develop their understanding and skills well. Staff share a strong commitment to student improvement and increasingly make effective use of data to assess students' capabilities and progress in order to plan teaching provision better and show students how they can improve. Some subject teachers make effective use of ICT to enhance learning and engage student interest though that has still to be fully developed particularly in supporting students with weaker literacy skills.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The headteacher provides very good leadership and her excellent vision gives the school focus and a clear direction. She is well supported by a strong and cohesive management team that has made considerable progress in developing effective whole school systems. Many of the governors are long standing and committed to the school. They have a good understanding its strengths and weaknesses and monitor and support the school managers well. However, they have been less effective in ensuring all statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very supportive and value the leadership of the school and the commitment of staff. They recognise the improvements made. Students in the main school and sixth form enjoy coming to school and appreciate the help they get. A number of students would value improved careers guidance and more extra-curricular activities.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- strengthen the literacy strategy particularly for Years 7-9 boys to help them further improve their standards.
- provide better ways of covering the National Curriculum programmes of study in all years and build on the best ICT practice seen in other subjects especially in those aspects that support literacy development.
- ensure that the good whole school monitoring and evaluation systems are fully embedded in each faculty area in order to identify and share the best classroom practice.

And, to meet statutory requirements:

- more effectively implement citizenship across the school.

- provide for religious education in the sixth form.

THE SIXTH FORM AT HEDINGHAM SCHOOL

The sixth form has 117 students. It is smaller than other sixth forms, although it has increased in size since the last inspection. Approximately 50 per cent of students from Year 11 progress into the sixth form. A very small proportion of students join the school at the beginning of Year 12. At the end of Year 13, about 53 per cent of students continue their education at university.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall provision in the sixth form is good. It provides largely open access to the mostly advanced level courses accepting a wider than average range of students. Achievement is good in that there is a high pass rate with students doing well in relation to their prior GCSE qualifications. The sixth form caters well for its students through a range of 21 courses leading to AS-level and A-level, and 2 GVNQ courses. It also provides a positive environment for their personal development. Teaching in the sixth form is good and students learn effectively as a result. Students achieve well in relation to their standards on entry. The school cares very well for its students and works hard to build an environment that is conducive to learning. Evolving partnerships, especially that of the North West Essex Rural Consortium, reflect the school's efforts to improve the range of opportunities for its students. The sixth form is cost-effective.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Good teaching, characterised by strong subject expertise, leads to good achievement.
- The range of courses caters well for students' aptitudes, aspirations and needs.
- There are very good reporting and review procedures.
- Positive relationships underpin sixth form life: students support one another and benefit from good relationships with their teachers.
- Students have very good attitudes to the sixth form and feel that they are treated as adults: they value the opportunities presented to become independent thinkers and to assume responsibilities within the school.
- The sixth form size is modest and the school recognises the importance of improving student retention to expand opportunities.
- Students would value more enrichment activities.
- The statutory requirements of religious education are not met.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

The provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. The term 'A level' is used to describe all the courses taken at two distinct levels – AS and A2 and consist of general (GCE) and vocational (AVCE) courses. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected fully though some were sampled.

CURRICULUM AREA	EVALUATION
English, languages and communication	English: Good. Achievement is good in response to good teaching. French: Satisfactory. Standards are broadly average and students make satisfactory progress. (This subject was sampled).
Mathematics	Good. Mathematics is an increasingly popular subject. Teaching is good. The needs of all students are met and the recent results of current Year 13 show an improvement.
Science	Biology: Satisfactory. Able teachers deliver an appropriate curriculum to students who are keen to learn. Chemistry: Good. Small, but increasing, numbers of students attain above expectations. (This subject was sampled). Physics: Good. Interested and pro-active students are achieving well. (This subject was sampled).
Information and communication technology	Good. Teaching is good. Current standards at A-level are above national averages.
Humanities	History: Good. Very good teaching and positive attitudes lead to good achievement. (This subject was sampled). Geography: Good. Teaching and learning are good. Students have positive attitudes. The department organises very good field study in the UK and abroad. Psychology: Good. Good teaching results in good learning outcomes. Religious Education: Good. Teaching is good and students learn well. (This subject was sampled).
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Product Design: Good. Very good teaching and learning includes innovative project work.
Visual and performing arts and media	Drama: Good. Teaching and learning are very good, as are standards. Numbers are small but increasing. (This subject was sampled). Music: Good. The school supports the subject at this level by allowing very small teaching groups. There is great potential for future development. Standards match pupil abilities. (This subject was sampled). Art and Design: Very Good. Students attain very high standards. Courses are well planned and delivered. Teaching is very good overall and can be excellent.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	GNVQ Land and Environment : Very Good. Teaching and learning are very good. Students are able to work in a range of vocational contexts. The department has access to excellent resources including a farm.
Business	This subject was not inspected.
Health and social care	Very Good. Teaching and learning are very good. Students demonstrate excellent attitudes and achieve well.
General Education	This subject was not inspected.

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

to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

Advice, Guidance and Support

The sixth form manager and a designated learning support assistant provide a very good quality of support and guidance in Years 12 and 13. Information about sixth form courses is good and students are well prepared for the requirements of GNVQ, AS-level and A-level courses. The quality of advice offered in preparation for university entry is very good, and students are well informed about careers opportunities. There are very good reporting and review procedures.

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The sixth form manager is hardworking and well organised in her approach. She is committed to creating a culture that raises expectations and promotes attainment. Policies and procedures are coherent and very effective. Planning for future developments, such as the new consortium, is very good.

Students' Views of the Sixth Form

83 students responded to the questionnaire. Ninety two per cent of those responding enjoyed being a student in the sixth form and 93 per cent thought that the teaching was challenging. Ninety one per cent thought that teachers were accessible and helpful if they had a problem with work, and the same number thought their work was assessed helpfully. Ninety four per cent deemed the staff to be expert in their subjects. Discussion between inspectors and a significant number of sixth form students, both formally and informally, indicates that students are very positive about the sixth form, the range of subjects offered, the quality of teaching and the level of support they receive. Critical views in the questionnaire relating to careers advice and the range of enrichment courses were not an issue when this was discussed. The strengths identified by the students are justified.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Students achieve well in almost all subjects in all years. GCSE results have continued to improve and are now above national average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the GCSE courses are above national average.
- Students throughout both the 11-16 phase and sixth form make good progress in most subjects and achieve well.
- Girls do significantly better than boys in most subject areas although some subject areas, including mathematics and science, have been more effective at raising boys' achievement.
- Weaker literacy skills limit achievement for some students, particularly boys, and standards in English at GCSE level are not as high as those in other areas.

Commentary

1. Students' standards on entry are just in line with national averages for the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, in other subjects, students enter with quite varied attainments. Students' standards are broadly average in humanities but in most other foundation subjects, including ICT, art, design and technology and physical education, students come to the school with standards a little below national average.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results 2003
English	34.6 (34.5)	33.3 (33.0)
mathematics	37.5 (36.6)	35.3 (34.5)
science	35.5 (34.4)	33.7 (32.9)

There were 198 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. By the end of Year 9 most students have made sufficiently good progress and achieve well across their different subjects. Results in summer 2003 for mathematics and science improved at the end of Year 9 and were above national average. When compared to schools taking students with similar primary school results, those two subjects had above average standards reflecting good achievement for students. Outcomes were more modest in English with end of Year 9 results broadly in line with national average for all schools and schools with similar student intakes reflecting satisfactory progress.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	57.0 (57.3)	52.6 (51.6)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (97.2)	86.3 (88.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (100)	96 (94.6)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.4 (38.0)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 168 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. The above average GCE results of 2002 were sustained in 2003. As the table above shows, the percentage of students gaining five grades A*-C was the same and although a few absent students reduced the other measures, the average GCSE performance of each student improved a little. This again reflected good progress and subsequent achievement for students in most of their subjects, particularly mathematics and science. Students attained standards in English GCSE in line with those nationally reflecting satisfactory progress against similar schools. Pupils often did well in their chosen GCSE courses particularly art, drama, design and technology, French, German and geography. All of this is in line with the school's realistic targets for steady and consistent improvements in students' standards in the core subjects in Years 7-9 and their average performance in their GCSE subjects.
4. The inspection found that Year 9 standards in most subjects are above national averages and students make good overall progress in Years 7-9. During the inspection, in nine out of ten lessons students were achieving appropriately and nearly two thirds of lessons students were doing better than expected. In mathematics, students achieve well and demonstrate growing confidence in most aspects including decimal fractions, factors and multiples, geometry and algebra. This is directly the result of the well informed and supportive class teaching. There are some less developed aspects such as investigatory skills and geometric drawing. Students also make good progress in science, particularly for the higher attaining students, evident in good work linking biological science to different cultures and environments. In English, students make good progress in some areas such as speaking and listening although writing is more variable. Extended writing is less evident particularly for lower attaining boys.
5. In most other subjects students achieve well in Years 7-9. A small minority of predominantly boys, make satisfactory rather than good progress, for example in French because of negative attitudes but this contrasts with the often very good progress made by most that language. The particularly strong music teaching enables students to make good progress in their skills. In a number of other subjects where students come to the school with less strong knowledge and skills, such as art, design and technology and physical education, students are doing well and are at least reaching national standards. This is true even where provision has been affected by some curriculum and assessment weaknesses, such as ICT where students develop an appropriate level of understanding and skills.
6. Current standards in GCSE courses reflect the most recent examination results. Students demonstrate above national average standards in most subjects. In the inspection, in well over nine out of ten lessons students were achieving appropriately and in seven out of ten lessons they were achieving above expectations. Mathematics is particularly strong for higher attaining students who additionally take GCSE statistics, as well as the lower attaining who cope well with some challenging mathematical concepts. Science is not quite as strong but still clearly above national average in terms of understanding and skills in practical investigation. English continues to be average in standard and although most students make satisfactory progress this hides considerable differences between boys' and girls' literacy levels.
7. The girls do significantly better than boys in terms of GCSE attainment although science and mathematics have been more successful in their strategies to reduce the gender difference. Both boys and girls usually perform better than national average in most subjects and this is reflected in recent GCSE results in languages, humanities, technology and arts subjects. Even so, girls' greater effort and more secure literacy skills enable them to achieve significantly better at GCSE. In a number of subjects, including otherwise successful ones, the boys' lack of confidence, as well as care and accuracy in writing and presentation, is a clear handicap. While boys often do well they have not greatly narrowed the overall difference in achievement with the girls. This was shown in the 2003 GCSE results where the 45.5 per cent of boys gained five grades A*-C, around average for boys nationally, compared with 66.3 per cent of girls, some 8.5 points better than girls nationally.

8. The achievement of students with special educational needs across all years and in most subjects is good. All students with special educational needs are entered for GCSE examinations, and analysis of their performance shows most do well compared with their prior attainment.

SIXTH FORM

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	97.9 (97.2)	97.8 (97.0)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	22.3 (33.96)	44.2 (42.0)
Average point score per pupil	212.2 (237.3)	252.4 (254.7)

There were 68 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

9. The school has an open sixth form and readily accepts both very able students as well as others it thinks can benefit from its largely advanced level course provision. A-level standards were a little below national average in 2003 but most sixth form students achieved well given their prior GCSE qualifications. The performance of girls was stronger than that of the boys. The school sixth form also provides GNVQ Intermediate for those students not able to work at A-level standard at that point and in 2003, those students achieved a pass rate of 100 per cent.
10. In lessons observed and in the samples of work scrutinised, standards are close to those found nationally and students are making good progress in their different subject choices. Students' work shows a good response to teaching. In all lessons, achievement and progress were never less than satisfactory and was good in nine out of ten lessons. Students' developing capacity for independent study contributes to their progress in lessons and assignments.
11. Students' standards in both numeracy and literacy are at an appropriate level. They become skilled listeners, and write with increasing fluency and conviction. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the independent use of ICT is very good. Sixth form students make good use of the Internet for research and independent learning.
12. There are no students with special educational needs in the sixth form.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students like coming to school, have positive attitudes and behaviour and develop well personally and socially.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students like coming to the school and relationships with teachers and each other are very good.
- The school expects and receives high standards of behaviour.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and the supporting educational courses are being developed to be more effective.
- The School Council makes a strong contribution to the life of the school.

Commentary

13. Students' attendance levels are above the national average. The method of recording attendance by hand-held computer terminal at the beginning of each class contributes well to attendance records. The school places a high priority on good attendance and it has effective liaison with the education welfare service which is based at the school. Good systems are in place to seek full explanations for any absences and the headteacher becomes personally involved in authorising holidays. These co-ordinated efforts maintain good attendance and contribute well to students learning. Students like coming to the school and are punctual to lessons.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (2003)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.4	School data	0.7
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1091	46	2
White – any other White background	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	5	0	0

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

14. Students of all ages generally have good attitudes to the work and of school life. Behaviour from the greater majority of students is good although, on occasion, a few students do not respond well to the opportunities the school provides for them. The behaviour policy of the school allows appropriate rewards and sanctions and may include lunchtime and after school detentions. The school keeps careful records of all incidents and teachers intervene effectively where necessary.
15. The high number of lunchtime detentions reflects the school's high expectations about behaviour and are mostly effective in avoiding the need for more serious sanctions. There have been two fixed term exclusions in the current school year.
16. Generally relationships throughout the school are very good, teachers are very supportive. The School Council makes a positive contribution to school life and is very well supported by senior staff. Students express good ideas and arrange fund-raising or charitable events safe in the knowledge that these will be well supported. Recent success includes a sponsored walk to raise monies for the school bid to become a specialist Maths and Computing College.
17. In normal lessons the attitudes and behaviour of students with special educational needs are generally no different to that of other students. Where learning support assistants (LSAs) are present to support students with special educational needs this is accepted well by all.

18. Although students initially expressed some concerns about bullying, there are few incidents and these are handled very effectively by the school. Students appreciate the help and support they generally receive. Overall, the positive student attitudes and behaviour recognised in the last inspection have been well maintained.
19. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and very good in the sixth form. The school has a very strong ethos, with aims well displayed in the main foyer. Contributions are made to local and international charities and students are well informed of current issues through different activities such as the performance at a local theatre to support World Aids Day. Teachers build upon the good relationships which exist, to be supportive and influential in students' school lives. Although there is not the opportunity for a whole school act of collective worship, there is provision for a daily act. Opportunities are provided in the developing spiritual, moral, social and cultural programme for students to establish a good understanding of values and beliefs and to reflect upon their experiences. Whilst the programme will encompass the whole provision of this subject, some aspects such as the 'thought for the day', are not always well led by teachers and some students are also reluctant to dwell upon this important moment of reflection.
20. The strong social provision is exemplified by a recent London visit organised by sixth formers for younger students. A very strong work experience programme does allow some students to be fully aware of work opportunities for the future.

SIXTH FORM

21. Students' attitudes to the school are very good. Students identify closely with the school and speak highly of the support they receive in the sixth form. Students in general feel that the school is responsive to their views and that they are able to assume a good level of responsibility. Students interviewed during the inspection week confirmed that they felt the sixth form worked very well although they would value a more clearly demarcated sixth form area.
22. Students are generally conscientious in their approach and can be relied upon to complete assignments at home and at school. Teachers are very accessible and offer high levels of support to individual students. Secure relationships, established over time contribute to the friendly, comfortable and mutually supportive character of the sixth form. Students work purposefully, either independently or in collaboration with other students.
23. The personal development of students is good. Students are expected to assume responsibilities and to contribute to whole school activities. In addition to organising charity appeals, they may, for example, run sports activities coaching younger teams, or take part in a programme of supporting younger learners in lessons. Sixth formers contribute to drama productions, a range of musical activities and other whole school events. An activities week is held in the summer term. Overall, sixth form students provide good role models for the rest of the school. They exhibit positive attitudes and a strong sense of community, as a result of which they feel at ease at the school.
24. There are many opportunities for informal discussions and students take full advantage of them. Their participation in the School Council is active. The school reciprocates well when students raise issues through the sixth form council and provides opportunities for students to participate in the further development of their ideas.
25. In the sixth form, students grow in confidence and become clear of their own learning needs and how best to meet them. They are well prepared for tertiary education by the time they leave the school. Approximately, 55 per cent of students gain university places each year. Arrangements for progression to certain FE providers and local colleges such as Writtle and Otley are well developed.

26. Overall, attendance is satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall. Nearly a third of teaching is very good and only a small percentage is less than satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Highly committed teachers who make considerable efforts to support student learning.
- Almost all teaching is at least satisfactory and three quarters is good reflecting effective planning and class management.
- Specialist knowledge is a strong feature that enables students to develop their knowledge and understanding well.
- Monitoring and assessment practice is much stronger than previously and helps student make good progress.
- Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good it reflects a more limited range of teaching and learning strategies that engage students less in their learning.
- Strategies to improve basic skills, particularly literacy for boys, are less developed, including the use of ICT.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 175 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5 (2.9%)	45 (25.4%)	83 (46.9%)	38 (21.4%)	5 (2.8%)	1 (0.6%)	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.

27. Teaching is good overall and is noticeably stronger in Years 10-11 and the sixth form. In Years 7-9 about two thirds of teaching is good or better with around a fifth of teaching being very good or better. Standards of teaching improve further in Years 10-11 with three quarters of teaching at least good and a third very good or better. These differences in quality can generally be attributed to more purposeful teaching directed to the clear outcomes required for GCSE and the fact that a little more teaching in Years 7-9 is done by non-specialists, for example in science and ICT. A positive feature is that teaching is good in almost all subjects reflecting a consistency in overall practice.
28. Parents praise the many dedicated teachers that enable students to do well in their subjects. It is this high level of commitment that students recognise and encourages them to greater effort even if on occasion the lesson content is not so exciting.
29. Most teachers are specialists and have an enthusiasm for their subject This is used well in nearly all subjects to challenge and develop students' knowledge and understanding. In mathematics, teachers use their good knowledge well to explain clearly and handle student misunderstanding sympathetically. The good skills of the geographers are also effective in involving all students and developing their understanding.
30. In the best planned lessons the learning objectives are shared with the students and content and materials used are sufficiently challenging and varied to meet the needs of all students.

French and German lessons have well sequenced activities that build on previous learning and develop students' speaking and listening skills.

31. Excellent methodology including the very effective use of resources is a strong feature of work in both art and music. In art for example, the very carefully structured demonstrations and insights enabled students to develop their skills in still life painting and appreciate colour theory. In music, the high expectations of teachers are combined with good relationships that encourage students to take risks in performance and use varied instruments and music technology. In design and technology too, good course materials are combined with informed individual help and advice that enable students to develop their practical skills.
32. Although there is much good teaching practice in the school there are nonetheless areas for improvement in a number of subjects where the best practice is not shared across the faculty. Some lessons in English, mathematics, ICT and science are less well structured with unclear learning outcomes, so slowing lesson pace. In other lessons, satisfactory progress is sustained more by the obvious commitment of the teacher and goodwill of students than the use of more varied and interesting methods and resources. In a number of subjects this includes the still limited application of ICT to enhance learning.
33. Given the weaker literacy skills of some students, particularly boys, few subjects have clearly planned strategies to strengthen writing and presentation skills. There are some good examples, such as design and technology, particularly in food, where ICT is well used to help students draft and redraft work and overcome particular weaknesses in literacy. However, in a number of subjects, including English, history and science, weaker literacy continues to slow student progress. Overall, a still developing whole school literacy strategy has yet fully to impact on teaching practice in many subjects.
34. The school uses assessment information well to monitor students' progress and attainment. Detailed information is given to all teachers to focus on how individual students are doing, to set realistic targets and to ensure they achieve as well as they should. This information is also used very effectively to identify students who need extra help and in particular to provide mentoring for boys in Year 11 so that they can meet the requirements for higher grades at GCSE and to identify the needs of gifted and talented students.
35. Consistent practices are in place for assessing work. Marking is usually thorough and gives students good guidance about how to improve. In the majority of subject areas assessment is thorough and constructive and students have a good understanding about how to improve. It is unsatisfactory, however in ICT in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 7 to 11 in history. These make less effective use of data to identify student potential and track student progress. The use of assessment to respond appropriately to students' needs is good in Years 10 and 11 but less well developed in Years 7 to 9, where planning for the progress of groups of differing ability in lessons is not always sharp enough to support lower attaining students or challenge higher attaining students.

Sixth Form

36. The overall standard of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. In over 90 per cent of lessons teaching and learning were at least good and very good or better in a third of lessons. The sixth form provides a secure and reflective environment where students have the opportunity to develop intellectually.
37. Teachers apply their strong subject knowledge effectively and set clear objectives for their students. Lessons are well planned and paced. Students are engaged in challenging activities that help them to sharpen their critical thinking and to heighten their interest in the subject.
38. Very good classroom relationships underpin the best teaching seen in the sixth form. Students make good gains in knowledge and understanding because lessons provide them with the

- opportunity to develop their confidence and to test their skills. Teachers know students very well and set appropriate targets for individuals.
39. Based on the student questionnaire and inspectors discussions with students, it is clear that students feel the standard of teaching in the sixth form is high and they particularly appreciate the fact that teachers are available to provide additional help and advice when it is required.
 40. Assessment information is used well by subject areas and by the school to monitor students' progress through their sixth form courses and to set appropriate targets within examination requirements. The school uses performance data to ensure that students achieve as well as they should and to provide extra help and guidance where appropriate. Assessment procedures in all focus subjects are good. Assessment is thorough and constructive, and is used effectively to help students to improve the standards of their work. There is very good practice in art, land and environment and health and social care. Students indicated in the pre-inspection questionnaire that their work was marked helpfully.
 41. At whole school level, very good use is made of national assessment information and data to calculate targets for all sixth form students in their subjects. Systematic use is made of the national *A-level Information System* (ALIS), to predict achievement at A2 level. A comprehensive database has been established centrally, containing current and predicted attainment data for every sixth form student in every subject.
 42. Sixth form students have a very good understanding of how well they are doing in the sixth form and how they can improve in their subjects. In addition, students' understanding of their learning needs is enhanced by teachers who give them individual time and attention to discuss their progress in relatively small teaching groups. Close attention is paid to examination requirements.
 43. The school runs regular professional development sessions to identify and disseminate good classroom practice in the sixth form.

The Curriculum

The quality and range of the curriculum are satisfactory though there are some weaknesses in ICT development, literacy strategies and the implementation of citizenship.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is broad and flexible and is appreciated by students and parents.
- Given the size of the sixth form the curriculum range and opportunities are good.
- Citizenship does not meet statutory requirements.
- The school has yet fully to develop an effective literacy strategy.
- The accommodation and resources are largely good.
- Extra-curricular participation in art is very good and is also good in sports activities.
- ICT is strong in some subjects but whole school planning and implementation has weaknesses.
- The religious education requirement is not met in the sixth form.

Commentary

44. The curriculum is broad, caters for all aptitudes and provides flexibility to enable students to tailor the curriculum to their particular needs. In addition to English, mathematics and a single science, all pupils in Years 10 and 11 take design and technology and either geography or history. Whilst the curriculum allows both French and German to be studied, one third of pupils are disapplied from modern foreign languages to enable them to take applied courses. In addition, students may opt to take three courses from a good range of subjects. The teaching of ICT through other subjects in Years 10 and 11 does not meet the statutory requirements. The school has procedures to provide for a daily act of worship or reflection within assemblies

and tutor groups but it is patchy in its implementation. The flexibility of the curriculum is well regarded by both students and their parents.

45. The provision for citizenship is unsatisfactory and does not meet the requirements. The school has identified the contributions that several curriculum subjects make and others that can be delivered through tutorial periods, assemblies, the modular careers programme, health education and religious education. However, the quality and coverage of these contributions have not been matched to the national requirements and guidance.
46. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) provides a mixed picture though is satisfactory overall. The programme is taught through different subjects, tutor time each morning, assemblies, the fortnightly tutorial lessons in Years 7 and 8, and the modular programme of careers education, health education and religious education in Year 11. PSHE is stronger in the taught lessons and the school's care systems and activities help students' personal development generally. The school runs a well regarded drugs awareness programme which develops knowledge and decision making skills. However, coverage of the PSHE curriculum is variable and often dependent on the confidence and commitment of the pastoral tutors who also contribute to the programme.
47. The governors have recently reviewed the arrangements for SEN students and recently appointed a new SEN co-ordinator. Overall, provision for students with special educational needs is sound. Students with special educational needs have full and equal access to the school curriculum. Formal extra-curricular provision for students with special educational needs means they have the opportunity to ask for and receive extra subject and specific support and guidance during the week. SEN students are well supported by teachers and learning support assistants in lessons and progress well. All have individual learning education plans and are well integrated in lessons.
48. Opportunities for students to enrich their studies are satisfactory. Students are provided with opportunities to extend their learning outside normal school hours in many curriculum areas and participate in sports both at lunchtime and after school - late buses are provided on Wednesdays to enable students to take part in these activities.
49. All students participate in two weeks of high quality work experience in Year 11. The scheme is run under the auspices of Trident. Parents are involved in the choices of work experience and strongly support this activity. Careers education is being revised to meet National Curriculum requirements. The school has a good careers library and range of related computer programs. The Connexions adviser runs regular sessions in the school.
50. Teachers and support staff are generally well matched to the needs of the curriculum. There are a few areas where non-specialists have to be used, such as ICT, but most subjects, including geography, art and mathematics, have strong specialist teams.
51. Resources for learning are good or very good in all subjects but physical education, where they are satisfactory. A significant investment has been made in ICT systems to support learning across subjects. Mathematics has access to 20 tablets PCs as well as an interactive whiteboard. Science has further computer systems which it uses for data logging and presentations. Computers are located in textiles and the resistant materials area where they are used for design, control and CAD-CAM. Media Studies has 6 computers used for video editing and presentational work. Data projectors are used well in religious education. Land and environment have the use of a farm. There is an adequate range of books in the school library.
52. Overall the accommodation is good in enabling coverage of the curriculum. There is a good range of specialist rooms for all subjects and some refurbishment and re-decoration has taken place. There is a school farm which provides good accommodation for rural studies teaching

and is also used for science lessons. Newly refurbished laboratories provide very good accommodation and this work is being extended to other science areas.

Sixth form

53. The quality and range of the curriculum are good. The curriculum provides for a wide range of interests and aptitudes. It contains a comprehensive range of academic and vocational advanced courses. The “pathway to success” programme enables students to follow combinations of advanced courses, key skills and GNVQ courses over a two-year period. There is clear progression from this programme to higher education, employment and further education. The GNVQ Intermediate in land and environment gives direct entry to either the Ottery or Writtle Agricultural Colleges.
54. Good provision is made for the development of key skills. Provision for ICT is variable in subjects across the curriculum, however students’ independent work demonstrates that they are competent, autonomous users of ICT. The school is ready to innovate in response to changing circumstances and student demand, as illustrated by the recent development of a course in psychology.
55. Provision for moral, social, cultural and spiritual development through different subject areas, the tutorial programme and a range of extra- curricular opportunities is good.
56. Many departments offer an interesting programme of external visits to enhance the curriculum.
57. Students are encouraged to participate in a range of extra- curricular activities, but this is necessarily limited because of the school’s rural location and the dependence on bus timetables. As the sixth form increases in size, there is scope to increase the range of enrichment opportunities, especially those bringing external speakers to the school.
58. The statutory requirements for religious education are not met.

Care, guidance and support

The school has effective care and guidance systems that support students well. A very good induction programme helps new students settle well into school life. Sixth form care and support are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good induction programme at entry to the school.
- Pastoral care provided is very strong.
- Protection issues are well understood and supported.
- The level of individual support and guidance provided to sixth form students is a key strength.

Commentary

59. The school has a well-developed programme of regular risk assessments and the checking of appropriate apparatus to ensure a safe environment. Minor accidents are dealt with well, appropriate records are kept. A number of first aiders have been well trained.
60. There are very good procedures in place for Child Protection matters with an experienced senior teacher as the designated person. In some departments specific arrangements have been made to ensure the health and safety of all students.
61. Effective relationships with outside specialist agencies enhance the quality of support and guidance for those students with special educational needs. Annual reviews are effective and

support those students with statements of special educational need as they move through the school. Parents and students' views are taken into account. However, students are not sufficiently involved in the setting and reviewing of their targets on IEPs.

62. Students are given appropriate guidance throughout their school life. Mentoring programmes are in place so that students get appropriate support. There are very appropriate external agencies contacted to cover all aspects of students' personal and medical needs. Students of special educational need are given good support at the school. There is very strong pastoral support given throughout the school. A well-structured pastoral team deal with problems very well. Students had some concerns, evidenced by questionnaire returns to the registered inspector, but inspection evidence would point to many of the concerns being able to be resolved in the well-developed structures within the school and very strong relationships which exist between staff and most of the students.
63. The school has very good induction programmes so that all students starting school life have had a carefully selected programme, including tests, and have developing contacts started at their primary school. Assessment and knowledge of students ensure that appropriate academic and personal support is offered during their time at school. A very well developed work experience programme ensures that students in Years 10/11 gain valuable business experience leading to their increasing awareness of practices away from school. The Connexions Service provides support for some students whilst older students have good contacts with teachers to ensure that information about sixth form courses is made available to them.
64. The school values the views of students, evidenced by the active students' council and sixth form council, who provide positive ideas to improve school life. When interviewed, students felt that bullying and misbehaviour were not major concerns and recognised the good initiatives of the school to combat these problems. The school has a planned programme of support which includes Year 11 students being trained in child support procedures in the C.H.I.P.S. programme to support younger students and raise their self-esteem.

Sixth form

65. The school provides very good support and guidance for its students. The good relationships in the sixth form are a significant factor in the support the students receive. The advice given by teachers and tutors is based on substantial personal knowledge of each student. Students are kept well informed of their progress and find their teachers very accessible. A dedicated tutorial team provides good advice and guidance on a daily basis.
66. The school provides good information about the courses available in the sixth form. Students say that they receive good advice when making their initial choice of sixth form subjects.
67. The sixth form manager focuses on the needs of individual students and ensures that barriers to effective learning are addressed. Students who are in danger of underachieving are quickly identified by referral or very good monitoring of performance data. The sixth form manager receives a fortnightly written report on each student from subject teachers. This report highlights individual concerns, which are acted upon promptly.
68. The quality of relationships between students, and between staff and students, is very good. The views of the students are valued and acted upon. There is a good level of trust between the students, teachers and other members of staff.
69. Provision for careers education is good. An initiative within this is the four-day Insight programme which is designed to introduce students to different management techniques.
70. The quality of guidance offered in respect of higher education is very good. The UCAS programme is monitored carefully. The school was one of the first in the country to apply the

electronic admissions system. The school enjoys good links with local universities and colleges.

71. Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety are good. There are appropriate procedures in place for monitoring their attendance.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS, OTHER SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY

There is a good partnership with parents and very good links with other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good information is provided to parents including a school website.
- Very good links exist with other schools and colleges.
- The school is less active in seeking the views of parents.

Commentary

72. The school provides good information for parents through the attractive school brochure, governors' annual report and website, together with a regular supply of letters, so that parents have a good understanding of the life and work of the school. Homework is regularly done, organiser diaries allow parents to assess the work being done and make comments. Curricular visits are made which do allow parents to provide funds for their children to participate. A good feature is the school information pack sent to every parent in advance of the next academic year. The school has not had many recent occasions specifically to seek the views of parents, but parents do attend open evenings in good numbers and at the meeting with the registered inspector were fully in support of the school. The links with parents are good.
73. The school is a valuable part of the local community evidenced by the number of local placements for work experience. Very strong contact is maintained with the many primary feeder schools. The school participates actively in the County's 'Crucial Crew' programme with students acting as peer educators for primary age pupils. Well developed links have been maintained with other secondary schools through the North West Essex Rural consortium and the North Essex Adult Community College, in the Healthy Living programme.
74. Parents and carers are invited to and attend annual reviews of students with statements of special educational need. Their views are recorded; hence they are fully involved and informed as to their child's progress towards the targets set out as part of the review process.
75. A number of community groups use the premises including retired persons and reprographic work is done to support other community groups and churches. A small number of parents are regularly involved in the School Association, they have raised monies to support the school, more particularly in the recent Fireworks Night, a community event. Older students have had good contact through the 'Insight into Management Programme' with local industrialists.
76. The school has been very active in establishing a consortium of post-16 schools and a further education college to provide a wider range of post-16 courses. Good contact is maintained with two agricultural colleges and, overall, the very strong wider links of the school have been sustained and developed.

SIXTH FORM

77. Parents value the school's efforts on their children's behalf and endorse its work in the sixth form. The working partnerships between the school and parents support learning well.

Parents receive two reports on an annual basis. In addition the school holds an annual parents' evening. The quality of reporting is very high. Targets for future learning are included in detailed summaries of attainment and effort in individual subjects.

78. The school has good links with the wider community. An evolving partnership with the North West Essex Rural Consortium is likely to offer substantial opportunities for exchange and enrichment in the sixth form including seminars, conferences and training programmes. An e-learning programme will support courses with lower numbers across the participating schools. The school is part of a national research project led by the University of Cambridge to look at the transition from AS to A-level.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher is very good and she is very well supported by a strong and cohesive senior management team. The governors have considerable strengths but governance is unsatisfactory because citizenship does not meet statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher is a very good leader with excellent strategic vision who maintains a close involvement in the running of the school.
- The very experienced senior managers support and develop particular initiatives and projects very well.
- Sixth form leadership is very good.
- There are particular strengths in the work of the senior middle managers in raising standards.
- Managers and teachers have created a positive and inclusive school ethos in all years including the sixth form.
- Monitoring and improvement strategies are particularly good at senior and middle management level, although practice is more variable in the different faculty groups.
- The school staff and governors combine well to ensure very effective financial management.
- Staffing and other factors have meant that the leadership and management of some whole school curriculum areas have been less effective.
- Despite the strengths of the governors in most areas, statutory breaches make governance currently unsatisfactory.

Commentary

79. Leadership of the school is very good. The long serving headteacher is highly regarded by parents and has the loyalty and support of the governors and staff. Her excellent strategic vision provides a clear focus for the school in its efforts to raise standards further. The senior management team has been successful in promoting a positive school ethos well supported by a highly committed school staff. Leadership is promoted throughout the school through the close working relationships the headteacher and deputy headteacher sustain with the senior middle managers who run the faculties. Those faculty leaders work well together through the senior middle managers group through which they are involved in the development of the school.
80. The very experienced senior management team coped well during the prolonged illness of the headteacher and the school lost little of its momentum for improvement. Those managers have a strong school presence but are also able to concentrate on their specific strengths in running aspects of the school particularly in developing school systems. Consequently there is a very well devised performance management process that is being used effectively to monitor and further improve middle management. Similarly the very good data analysis of student attainment and progress is having a major impact on improving school assessment systems.

81. Senior management monitoring and support of senior middle managers are strong. There are also a number of very effective faculty heads, although within faculties there is some variation in the quality of monitoring and action taken to improve practice.
82. The managers involved in pastoral support and, increasingly, academic monitoring help ensure the school is orderly and inclusive with good opportunities for student participation in the running of the school. However, the more explicit educational programmes that support student development such as citizenship are less developed, in part because of insufficient school focus but mainly because of a lack of curriculum co-ordination and development.
83. Similarly, despite the commitment of the mathematics faculty head there are some weaknesses in the management of the curriculum and whole school co-ordination of ICT. These will be partially resolved with the new ICT subject leader but there is no specific senior manager responsible, although the headteacher has a clear picture of where she wants the school to be.
84. Another less developed area is the whole school literacy policy in response to the National Literacy Strategy. The school recognises literacy promotion as a priority although co-ordination and management have yet to be fully established.
85. Leadership and management of special educational needs provision are sound overall. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The learning support department acts well as a team because of the collegiate approach adopted. However, despite the good work of the learning support assistants (LSAs), the development and monitoring of SEN policy and provision are in their early stages.
86. Financial management systems and the monitoring arrangements are both very strong. This is because of the effective work of the bursar and the school's use of termly audits provided by the local authority. The school also makes use of those local services tendering for capital projects and school services and succeeds in ensuring best value. The governors monitor arrangements carefully and insist that financial data is available in a clear and readily understood form.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,247,962	Balance from previous year	117,243
Total expenditure	3,249,413	Balance carried forward to the next	115,792
Expenditure per pupil	3,140		

87. The school, with the governors, uses its finances very effectively. Annual balances are kept to a minimum through good forecasting and modest contingency balances, so enabling full use of funding evident in the recent refurbishment of a science laboratory.
88. Many of the governors are long established and very committed to the school. They take their responsibilities seriously in terms of monitoring and supporting the work of the school. They have also played an active part in the development of the school working with the deputy headteacher and others in preparing a bid for specialist college status in mathematics and computing and raising the necessary matched funding. However, for governance to be satisfactory the governing body must ensure that the school meets all statutory requirements and this is currently not the case in citizenship or in the provision of religious education in the sixth form.

SIXTH FORM

89. Very good leadership, on the part of the sixth form manager and the headteacher, provides a clear direction for the development of the sixth form, and is well supported by senior management, governors and the staff of the school.
90. The sixth form manager practises an open and consultative style of leadership where the voices of individuals are heard. Her open minded, reflective and well-organised approach underpins a strong commitment to sixth form improvement.
91. Overall daily administrative arrangements, systems and procedures work very well.
92. Students are known very well individually and benefit from very good levels of personal support. A newly recruited LSA is very accessible to students and provides a high level of individual guidance on a wide range of issues. He also monitors the quality of independent study. The school has recently put effort into producing personalised diary/organisers for use by all sixth form students.
93. The school's strategies for monitoring and evaluating sixth form performance are very good. Overall, planning for improvement and evaluation of outcomes are effective in ensuring the progress of the sixth form.
94. Funding is used in a cost-effective way to give students a good curriculum and good quality of teaching.

Resources

95. Staffing arrangements are very good. Overall, the number of teachers is in good proportion to the number of sixth form students. The expertise and experience of teachers are well suited to the demands of sixth form teaching. Several very small teaching groups have been formed to accommodate student choice.
96. Students have satisfactory, if a little worn, common room space. Study facilities, including the library, are broadly satisfactory. Students are generally able to access computers, and the Internet for independent study. Overall, the sixth form is satisfactorily resourced with learning materials.

EXAMPLES OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

Example of outstanding practice : art

The excellent use of different artists, in this case for work on perspective, can inspire students' own work and develop a deeper understanding.

The bright and colourful displays welcome Year 10 students to their art lesson. They arrive eager to be creative, and listen attentively, to the teacher's introduction. She presents the paintings of Vermeer, Van Gogh, and Kit Williams, with enthusiasm, telling how the artists cleverly used perspective to "bring the outside world into the composition", - through windows and mirrors. Large colour reproductions of the paintings are passed around so that the students can study the pictures closely, and they quickly become absorbed in questions and answers about the artist's aims and objectives. "Van Gogh's colour is very expressive, but his chair is strangely drawn". The teacher makes a large drawing showing how perspective lines can be distorted and overlapped to create highly original semi-abstract images. Students are noticeably inspired by this, and apply the idea to their own direct observational drawings of rooms at home that they have done for homework. They work purposefully and productively and the resulting drawings are impressive. Students take great care with their work, relating the styles and techniques of other artists to their own. Consequently standards are well above average, and there is potential for all students to gain the high grades in their GCSE examinations.

Example of outstanding practice : music

A Year 9 music lesson provided a rewarding and intensive musical experience for both students and the inspector observing the lesson. It also demonstrated high attainment and very high achievement, supported by excellent teaching and learning.

One of the important functions of the music department is to broaden student cultural horizons, and this lesson provided a first rate example of this process in action. The school has borrowed for the term the County's Balinese Gamelan, and is giving all students the experience of playing it. Part of the process is understanding its significance in its society, and in treating it properly. For example, all players must remove their shoes, and no-one must step over any part of the instrument.

The students found this fascinating, and their attitude was exceptionally positive. Guided by the teacher who has developed a great deal of expertise, the students learnt to play an authentic piece of music involving every member of the class in its making and performance. All students played an integral part and discovered their own role to be equally important in the making of the whole piece.

The final performance, which was recorded, provided a wonderful musical and social experience for all present; it was one of those experiences which sent a chill down the spine. The rapt silence with which the piece ended while the sound died gradually away indicated the depth of impression which this music made on all those present, whatever their experience or background. It was a privilege to be there.

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

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and helps students to achieve well in lessons.
- Teachers create a good climate for working so lessons are orderly and productive.
- Teachers establish good relationships with students who are confident and enthusiastic about their work.
- Schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are insufficiently precise about learning activities and outcomes, especially with regard to developing literacy skills.
- Boys' attainment is lower than that of girls at all ages and falls further behind in Years 10 and 11.
- Standards in English literature at GCSE are low and boys' attainment is poor.

Commentary

97. Attainment in English on entry to the school is broadly in line with national standards. In 2003, students' standards at the end of Year 9 had improved to be a little above national average against all schools and in line with standards expected for similar schools. This reflects satisfactory progress over Years 7-9 although girls did considerably better than boys. This pattern repeated itself in GCSE English language with the overall grades A*-C rate about in line with national average and again reflecting satisfactory student progress over the GCSE period. However, a closer examination shows that girls make up a disproportionately large number of the higher GCSE grades and overall do considerably better than girls nationally. This highlights a serious concern the school has in trying to raise the general level of literacy of boys and combat a certain loss of momentum the boys show in both English language and literature.
98. Standards seen in the inspection indicate some improvement with standards in Years 7-9 to be a little above national expectations. Students in Years 7 to 9 make good progress in speaking and listening and most write readily on a range of formal and creative tasks, although there is less evidence of extended writing by lower attaining students. In Years 10 and 11, higher attaining students produce above average coursework, but although they engage with the texts studied they do not explain adequately the qualities of style or language. Most middle attaining students plan their work well though do not develop their ideas sufficiently. The work of low attaining students contains frequent mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Speaking and listening skills are often secure at GCSE level both in group work and discussion. Reading skills develop well and students can identify purpose and bias and arrive at thoughtful judgements that they can support with evidence. Boys are noticeably weaker in the extent to which they demonstrate a good range of writing skills which are less developed than their speaking skills. There is noticeably less emphasis on extended writing among lower attaining students and many boys and all of this limits their success in coursework and in examinations.
99. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 looks to be better than the most recent results indicate. Students who are broadly average when they enter the school are achieving above average standards, this is the result of good teaching in well managed lessons. Students with special educational needs achieve appropriately and make good progress. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is still only just satisfactory. Girls do well but boys' weaker basic skills are proving to be a barrier to improvement in English examinations and this contrasts with science and mathematics where

the gender gap is smaller. The school continues to use different strategies to raise boys' achievement including adopting more 'boy friendly' examination work schemes and using assessment effectively to show students how they can improve. Indications are that there is some improvement in earlier years though less obvious at GCSE level. There are fewer boys than girls in higher attaining GCSE English groups and may indicate that boys' self-esteem and personal expectations are lower.

100. Teaching and learning are good overall and a number of very good lessons were seen. There were no unsatisfactory lessons. The best teaching is characterised by a range of activities involving students in an investigation or an analysis and making them accountable for their progress by reporting back to the class or organising a short presentation. In a very good Year 9 poetry lesson all students were required at least twice to justify views arrived at individually or as part of a group. Good materials have been produced, for example a Library Skills Booklet and a "Poetry of Protest" booklet. New schemes of work define what topics should be covered, but they have not been sufficiently developed into lesson plans relating precisely to specific gains in knowledge and skills. In Years 7-9 students benefit from good marking which recognises both the quality of achievement and personal effort. Valuable aids to learning like Reading Logs and Spelling Logs have been introduced but are not used consistently. Students preparing for GCSE benefit from guidance about the quality of their work and what they must do to attain a higher grade.
101. The leadership of the manager of the English learning area is good and his first year in post has resulted in good progress in the subject. Work began on improving programmes of study for Years 7 to 9 to include more of the National Literacy Strategy and the Key Stage Three Strategy for English. This will continue under his leadership. A more consistent approach to teaching is being established with higher expectations of students who are responding positively. He monitors the quality of teaching and learning in the subject. Internal school reviews and good support from the local education authority have identified key issues, like literacy and the underachievement of boys, which are being addressed. The curriculum is well planned and meets the needs of students of all abilities. Where there are weakness, for example the need to teach more ICT skills in English, these have been recognised as priorities. A club for Year 11 students who are behind with their coursework operates and educational visits have been arranged, like the ones to see "Holes" and "Oh What a Lovely War." Extra- curricular opportunities generally are underdeveloped. Teachers are able and well deployed although the extent to which they collaborate as a team is limited in some cases because of other subject commitments.
102. Progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory although is improving with the new subject leadership, good senior management support and continued involvement of the local education advisory service, particularly in developing a wider and more effective literacy strategy.

French and German

Overall provision in modern languages is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in GCSE examinations in French and German and improving
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and enables pupils to achieve well
- Students' attitudes are positive, they have good relationships with their teachers and their behaviour is usually very good
- Leadership of the subject is excellent and has led to excellent progress since the last report
- Teachers work very well as a team and there is a high level of consistency
- Assessment information is not used effectively to meet the needs of students of differing ability and plan for their progress in lessons

- Opportunities for students to use the language themselves in realistic situations are limited
 - The progress of a small number of students in Years 7 to 9 is hampered because they are withdrawn from language lessons on a regular basis.
103. Standards achieved in French and German in work seen are above average. In GCSE examinations standards are well above average. Students do better in French and German than they do in other subjects. A high proportion of candidates achieve the highest grades in examinations. This represents very good achievement in relation to students' prior attainment. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Standards have improved significantly since the previous report. Listening skills are very well developed; students respond promptly and appropriately to the extensive use of the languages being learned in lessons. The majority display a very good understanding of grammar and apply it accurately in speech and writing to express their views. By the end of Year 11 students write and speak at length about a variety of topics, higher attainers operating from memory and lower attaining students adapting learned phrases to meet their needs. Some students use the language creatively to produce poems. Pronunciation is usually good but where students rely heavily on written notes their pronunciation in French is adversely affected. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average. Students have positive attitudes towards their learning. They listen attentively, are usually very well behaved and most respond enthusiastically when they are given the opportunity to work informally in pairs and small groups, use the languages to find out information or to solve problems. A minority of boys in Year 9 have negative attitudes and set out to disrupt lessons but they are managed effectively.
104. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. All lessons observed were satisfactory or better. More than 8 out of every 10 lessons seen were good or better and 1 in 5 were very good or excellent. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the last report. Teachers work very effectively together as team to share ideas and spread good practice. There is a high level of consistency across the department as a result. Teachers have a very good command of the languages they teach and use the languages effectively and extensively in lessons. This is very effective in developing students' speaking and listening skills. However, some opportunities are missed to challenge higher attaining students to interpret for others. Lessons are well planned with clear presentations of new language, frequent opportunities for students to practise and well sequenced activities which enable students to build effectively on previous learning. Good use is made of the overhead projector and visuals so that students rapidly identify patterns and use the language themselves. Students make the best progress where they are required to work in pairs and groups, for example to work at their own pace through a variety of activities, practise informally in pairs or use the languages to find out information. Students respond enthusiastically to problem solving activities which reinforce their knowledge of structures and grammar. Progress is slowed where teacher- led activities are lengthy and students do not have the opportunity to use the language themselves. Lower attaining students' progress is sometimes hampered because they are not given enough support to achieve tasks, particularly listening tasks, successfully. Opportunities are missed in plenary activities to demonstrate how answers, for example in reading tasks, were arrived at and in listening tasks opportunities to predict what is going to be heard.
105. Leadership of the subject is excellent. There is a clear vision of the way forward and planning is clearly focused on raising standards. Very effective action has been taken to address the issues raised in the last report and as a result there has been excellent improvement in standards, the quality of teaching and learning and in students' attitudes. Management of the subject is very good, the monitoring and development of teaching and learning are very good.
106. The curriculum provision overall is good but the withdrawal of a small number of students in Years 7-9 for extra help with basic skills is inappropriate and hampers their progress in languages.

107. The use of assessment is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. However information is not used effectively to meet the needs of all students – especially the less able – in lessons to plan for their progress through National Curriculum levels.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

108. During the inspection examples of good practice were observed in many subjects, especially the teaching of new words and concepts. In music and art lessons teachers encourage students to be precise in their use of critical and technical language. Drama develops speaking skills, making students consider pitch, tone and purpose when characters speak. Physical education teachers use questions well to develop and to check students' learning. A good booklet of library skills and study skills makes a valuable contribution to the curriculum for Year 7. Many subjects reported that speaking skills of students are more developed than their writing skills, but examples of teachers helping students with their writing were less frequent than vocabulary work. Spelling and grammar mistakes are corrected by teachers in design and technology and in ICT. Teachers in modern foreign languages, religious education and design and technology teach students to write in a variety of styles and help them redraft their work.
109. At the time of the last inspection the literacy standards of the students were reported to be good, but the school has since recognised the need to improve students' abilities in reading and writing as important elements in their educational progress. A literacy co-ordinator was appointed in January 2002 and all teachers received some training related to the teaching of new vocabulary. A "Spellchecker" booklet was produced listing key words in all subjects. Since then progress has slowed and has been inconsistent. Some subject areas, like art, have their own literacy policy, but there is as yet no literacy policy for the whole school. The working party established to promote good literacy teaching in all subject areas was less effective than had been hoped and has been replaced by arrangements where LEA advisers work with learning area managers to improve teaching and raise standards. A fully effective and consistent whole school policy to further improve students' reading and writing skills, especially those of boys, has yet to be established.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership in the subject is very effective.
 - High standards are achieved at both National Curriculum Tests and GCSE.
 - Significant improvement has occurred in standards and achievement since 2000.
 - The teaching team are strongly supportive and set high standards that students endeavour to reach
 - The use of regular testing and assessment data helps students achieve well
 - Teachers are very committed but teaching and learning are on occasion thorough rather than inspiring
 - Mathematics teaching does not adequately incorporate aspects of spiritual, moral and cultural education into the schemes of work.
110. At the end of Year 9 the standard of attainment was above the national average in 2003, with some students reaching very high levels and compared favourably with similar schools. This has been part of a trend of continuing improvement over recent years. The GCSE results in both 2002 and 2003 were above the national average.
111. The standard of work seen in Years 7 – 9 was above national expectation and some well above. Students are broadly competent at using computational skills to solve a variety of

problems, although there are some weaknesses in basic numeracy. They are confident with place values, decimal fractions and percentages and Year 9 students can deal with recurring decimal fractions. They understand and can apply factors and multiples, square and cube numbers and square roots. Work on shapes and space and angles, for example calculating exterior angles in polygons, is largely above average but there are weaknesses in drawing geometric constructions. Algebra is a particular strength. In all years there is a relative weakness in investigational skills, particularly in earlier years.

112. The standard of work seen in Years 10-11 was above average. Algebra is developed to levels well above average. By Year 11 lower attaining groups work competently and are above expectations. Good understanding is apparent in work on angles in various shapes, including circles. Constructions continue to present some problems, e.g. in loci. Above average attainment is seen in the calculating of areas and volumes of regular and irregular figures.
113. The students enter the school in Year 7 with attainment levels in line with national expectations and make good progress and achieve well by Year 9 to reach standards above national average. GCSE similarly achieve well to reach above average standards and in many cases well above in terms of higher grades. Progress by those students with special educational needs is good. There is no sustained pattern of difference between the rates of progress of boys and girls. Boys do perform below the girls but they are above national averages for boys and the gap has narrowed in recent years. Generally the presentation and accuracy of boys' work is not as good as that of the girls and this may affect outcomes.
114. The good achievement is a consequence of some good teaching supported by very effective, regular diagnostic assessment tests. These are very well used to track students' progress and to set medium and longer-term targets. Short-term assessment, through marking and direct feedback, is less effective. The use of IT resources for teaching also promotes high achievement. The students' generally co-operative nature, their willingness and motivation, encouraged by the positive ethos of the subject, also enhance the learning.
115. The quality of teaching and learning overall is good. Teachers demonstrate their good knowledge of mathematics in handling students' misunderstandings confidently and sympathetically. Explanations are clear and well supported by logically structured questions. This engages students' interest. Broad planning, based on the comprehensive schemes of work, is good. Learning objectives are stated and when these were used well, they are shared with a class. This establishes a goal for the students and a basis for review at the end of the lesson and the setting of appropriate homework for assessment. Lessons are often challenging and this motivates most students though on occasion, where the content is too difficult it can hinder progress for those that are less confident. A few lessons are less effective where they are less well planned. Prolonged periods of written work slowed pace and important learning points were not always reinforced at the end of a lesson.
116. The leadership of the subject is very good. Overall management is good. The drive and determination to improve standards have proved very successful over recent years. The success is built on an extensive revision programme and a precise knowledge of the requirements and techniques at national tests and examinations. However, the curriculum lacks some breadth in the schemes of work for spiritual, moral and cultural aspects of the subject.
117. Since the previous inspection, standards and achievement have improved significantly.

Mathematics across the curriculum

118. Overall standards are satisfactory. The National Numeracy Strategy has not been fully implemented in mathematics. Some departments do not yet have a written policy. Although there are few overt examples of mathematics being incorporated as an integral part of the other subjects there is evidence of it being well used in ICT, design and technology and

geography. Opportunities are missed in some subjects. Teachers in the mathematics department ensure that appropriate applications of the subject are drawn to the attention of students, for example handling and interpreting data. Graph work is well used in geography but is found to be a relative weakness in science.

SCIENCE

Overall provision for science is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE standards are improving and above national average.
 - Hardworking team and teachers with a capacity to improve further.
 - The overall commitment of teachers is high and this makes teaching good.
 - The faculty is very well led and resulted much better organisation and standards.
 - Monitoring and assessing student progress have been developed well.
 - Literacy is less well developed.
 - Procedures for monitoring and sharing best practice are in early stages of development.
 - There are still some limits on resources and accommodation although much has improved.
119. Attainment of pupils entering the school is in line with that seen nationally. By the end of Year 9 pupil attainment is above national. Standards have been rising since 1999. Compared to schools with a similar intake, achievement from Year 7 to 9 is very high showing good progress. Girls' progress is better than boys'.
120. GCSE results have continued to improve over recent years and in 2003 the proportion of students attaining grades A*-C was above national average. Significantly, the boys have improved so that there is little difference between boys and girls in the results. This reflects some success in departmental efforts in raising standards and reducing gender differences. Rural science meets the needs of a wide range of students including some with special educational needs and students have continued to improve their standards in this GCSE course.
121. In lessons and work seen, standards in Year 9 are above national average and reflect good progress for most students over Years 7-9. In earlier years students show a developing understanding of science reflecting some effective teaching evident in the high standard of work on Inuit Eskimos that linked scientific study to environmental and cultural factors. Year 8 girls showed similarly showed good understanding and presentation of their ideas in work on food chains and energy transfer. Lower attaining students made good progress though found some of the scientific theory difficult. Higher attaining students in Year 9 reach high National Curriculum levels reflected in very good quality coursework.
122. Students continue to make good progress in their GCSE work and, in Year 11, standards are above national average. Year 10 students are still developing their understanding of scientific principles and for some students their literacy skills inhibit their capacity to express their ideas. This is particularly true of lower attaining students some of who do not consistently complete their class and homework.
123. Year 11 work shows significant improvement as students develop greater understanding. The stronger work is in aspects of physics and chemistry evident in work on electromagnetism and hydrocarbons though the less challenging work in biology results in more modest outcomes. Work in rural science shows good progress in understanding and applying ideas. Most students can carry out scientific investigations with developing skills in analysis and evaluation.

124. Overall teaching is good. The major strength is the high level of commitment teachers give in terms of their time and effort to help students improve. Strengths in Years 7-9 teaching include effective planning that showed a readiness to adapt work schemes to better meet the needs and interests of underachieving boys. The specialist teacher have good knowledge and explain scientific ideas well. This was evident in a Year 8 lesson on food chains that enabled students to develop good understanding. Lessons are usually well organised, often with good use of group work that ensure students are actively involved. On occasion, the use of text-based learning materials rather than pictures and diagrams makes some scientific information less accessible for some lower attaining students including those with special educational needs. Teaching and learning at GCSE level are good. The best teaching is well informed and engages the interest of the students. This is well illustrated in a lesson on food substances that used food packaging as stimulus material to improve understanding and develop skills in investigation and discussion. Similarly good lessons are characterised by clear learning outcomes shared with the student, brisk pace and effective summing up and reinforcement of important knowledge. Learning support assistants provide ensure that special educational needs students are well supported and keep up with the class. Teachers are almost always committed but there is some classroom practice that engages students less well and, on occasion, less organised classroom management leads to an unsatisfactory rate of learning.
125. Faculty management is very good. The higher standards reflect the many improvements in facilities as well as policies and practices. Most laboratories have been refurbished reflecting substantial investment by the school. Textbooks and ICT facilities have also been substantially improved and used to enhance the curriculum. Work schemes have also been much revised to improve teaching and learning and increase ICT use. A significant area of development has been the setting up of a monitoring and assessment database and considerable effort has been made to improve assessment practice that is now good. Part of the effort to improve standards has been directed to raising boys' achievement that has lagged behind the girls' and recent results indicate some success. The development of a literacy strategy that would help some students, particularly boys, is in its early stages. New staff are well supported and though there has been a focus on teaching and learning there is still considerable variation in teaching quality within the department.
126. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. The rural science course continues to be strong and standards in the GCSE courses are now above national average with management of the subject much improved.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision of ICT for students aged from 11 to 16 years is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment in GCSE ICT is well above the national average.
- The use of ICT to support learning is well developed across many subjects.
- The quality of teaching is good overall although it ranges from very good to unsatisfactory.
- Some staff are still unaware of the potential of ICT particularly in supporting basic skills development.
- The further development of the subject is on hold until new subject leadership is in place.

127. GCSE results in 2003 were well above national average.
128. About two thirds of students now take the GCSE and standards of work seen reflect the recent well above average results. Coursework shows a good range of study with an emphasis on the use of spreadsheets at a relatively advanced level as well as database construction. By Year 11, students can create a template letter and merge fields from a database to produce a mailing list for a health club. In doing so they work fluently between a database, word

processing program and image editor. Students not taking the GCSE ICT just about get their ICT entitlement through use in other subjects. although not to the same high standard.

129. National strategy materials are being introduced in Years 7 and 8 and current standards in these years are at the expected level. However the current Year 9 programme is insufficiently challenging and pitched at largely basic skills development at the expense of a more sophisticated understanding and application. Students in Year 7 are more closely following the National Curriculum expectations and able to design appropriate materials and research effectively using the Internet.
130. Students come to the school with lower than average ICT skills and make good progress in most aspects of ICT in spite of the provision in Year 9. There are areas such as literacy, where ICT applications for researching, drafting and correcting work are under-utilised. In specific ICT lessons most students make good progress, including those with special educational needs. Boys and girls make similar progress.
131. Teaching is good overall, being good or very good in just over half of lessons. Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 9. The quality of teaching is variable, ranging from very good to unsatisfactory. There is some teaching by non-specialist teachers. Where teaching was very good the teaching methods made a complex mail merge task accessible to all students in the group. Clear individual guidance enabled students to make progress, working at the higher levels of the subject. High expectations gave rise to good use of time and good progress was made in the acquisition of subject knowledge. In an unsatisfactory lesson, students undertook an exercise that largely involved typing lists of names into a spreadsheet. Opportunities were missed to use the spreadsheet at a higher level to develop skills associated with modelling, and attainment was not promoted at the expected level.
132. Not all teachers completed a national training programme for ICT and so some are not making effective use of resources, particularly in English to support boys' weaker literacy. Around half of the teachers have been provided with laptop computers under a national scheme. An example of the effective use of ICT in subjects is the use of presentation software by students in a biology lesson to present their understanding of their subjects of research.
133. Leadership of ICT developments has been good and there is a clear plan for promoting learning through ICT use across subjects. Recent decisions over provision are starting to impact on the quality of teaching and learning in subjects. There are some weaknesses in the management of ICT in respect to ensuring progression in Years 7 to 9 and the monitoring of teaching to ensure consistency. This will be addressed with the new subject leader. ICT technical systems are effectively managed and work reliably. Since the last inspection attainment by ages 14 and 16 has improved. Most subjects now make good use of ICT.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

134. There is about one computer for every five students and this is broadly in line with national average for secondary schools. A new ICT area in the library is well used by students to support research-based approaches to learning. Some students are able to access their school work from home via the Internet. Significant resources have been located in subject areas, notably in mathematics, science and design and technology. Other subjects make less use of ICT, notably English and art, although there is capacity for subject areas to book ICT rooms. The school has temporarily delegated subject leadership to another faculty head who has made particular effort to map ICT use. Whole school monitoring of qualitative use is still to be developed, although the headteacher has a clear idea where she want the school to be.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a clear commitment to heighten interest in the subject.
 - Teachers deliver well-structured lessons and make good use of different strategies and resources to promote learning.
 - The department has produced a very good set of coursework handbooks for use with Years 7 to 11.
 - Key departmental policies and procedures are not formalised.
 - Weaknesses in literacy impact adversely on achievement.
 - There are inconsistencies in the quality and rigour of assessment.
 - The monitoring and analysis of student progress are underdeveloped.
 - Students are making insufficient use of computers to assist learning.
135. In 2003, GCSE results were in line with the national average for all maintained schools. 65 per cent of students achieved grades A* to C, compared to 57 per cent in 2002. Girls outperformed boys, although the boys' results improved in 2003.
136. Inspection evidence shows that students are attaining standards that are in line with those expected nationally by the end of Year 9. This represents satisfactory achievement. Students have a basic knowledge and understanding of the major historical events and personalities they are studying. They appreciate that history is based on evidence. Overall, students have good listening skills and satisfactory oral skills, but their writing skills are less assured. Lower attaining students can write in simple sentences to describe historical events but their work is frequently flawed by poor sentence construction, faulty grammar and spelling errors. Higher attaining students write more extensively and with greater fluency. They draw on their knowledge and understanding to identify and evaluate sources of information, which they use critically to reach and support conclusions. Most students show a developing sense of chronology and the majority are beginning to use historical terms appropriately.
137. At the end of Year 11, overall standards attained by students are in line with those expected nationally. Higher attaining students are ready to pursue lines of historical enquiry independently. They select, organise and use relevant information to reach well-substantiated conclusions. Many lower attaining students still find difficulty in writing at length, and in sustaining their concentration. They are dependent on their teachers for their learning.
138. Students arrive at the school with few skills in history. They make satisfactory to good progress overall, largely due to the focused teaching of basic historical skills. Lower attaining students, and those with special educational needs, generally make similar rates of progress as their peers.
139. The quality of classroom teaching overall is good. Teachers possess a strong enthusiasm for history and display good levels of subject knowledge. Interesting lessons are carefully planned, clearly structured, and well paced. Imaginative resources are used to stimulate historical curiosity and help understanding. In the best lessons, support is provided for slower learners through the provision of appropriate teaching materials. Overall, levels of engagement are good, although student concentration can lapse during writing tasks.
140. The subject provides good opportunities to develop interpretative and analytical skills. However, it is in the domain of literacy that many students, and especially boys, find their most significant challenge. Although teachers focus on literacy skills in class, many students need regular practice in extended writing through greater emphasis on homework, and further guidance in checking the grammar and sense of their writing, if they are to acquire the

confidence to express themselves fluently. As yet the subject has provided few opportunities to develop ICT skills in lessons due lack of access. For the future, teachers aim to prioritise the integration of ICT.

141. The head of department has been in post for fifteen years and despite a personal enthusiasm for history which is reflected in a positive ethos, management of some aspects is unsatisfactory. There is no departmental handbook, and policies and procedures are not accessible in written form. Although teachers share good practice openly and meet regularly on an informal basis, no formal policy of departmental monitoring is in place. As a result, inconsistencies occur in the quality and rigour of marking. Substantial energy has been channelled into the production of very good coursework handbooks, which cover programmes of study in Years 7 to 11. These demonstrate that the department has a clear sense of direction. However, there are no corresponding schemes of work. In the same way, although appropriate priorities are being set for the future, they are not formalised. The very good quality of lesson preparation is not matched by the assessment of learning outcomes. The head of department recognises that there is scope to track student progress more closely and to analyse value-added data across the age range.
142. The history area has attractive displays, some of which celebrate student achievement. A programme of visits is designed to enrich the curriculum, although this does not yet extend to all year groups. There is scope for the department to broaden the historical awareness of the students by offering history clubs. Topics of study help towards the development of moral, spiritual, cultural and social understanding, and in the teaching of citizenship.
143. There has been some decline from the standards of attainment, teaching and learning recorded in the last inspection report.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at GCSE are consistently above average and recently well above average.
 - Students are well motivated and achieve well.
 - Teachers are very committed and their teaching is good.
 - Leadership is very good.
 - Links with citizenship are not well developed yet.
144. Results in geography are consistently above national average. Geography is a popular choice, especially for boys of all abilities. Results improved further in 2003 with impressive proportions of students gaining A and A* grades.
 145. Standards seen in the inspection reflected the above average examination results. For example, Year 7 students have undertaken good local fieldwork, and were observed in class making contrasts between urban and rural areas, and evaluating positive and negative features of contrasting environments. Year 7 students also explored with enthusiasm the reasons for weather contrasts within the UK, and the teacher welcomed their probing questions and perceptive hypotheses. Year 8 students developed a level of understanding of river erosion which, a generation ago, was not normally achieved before the sixth form. In Year 9, students worked well in pairs, and produced effective analysis of land use in ten National Parks. Year 11 students had undertaken urban field study in Colchester, and were developing a sound understanding of urban structure.
 146. Achievement in geography is good. The entry level is similar to the national average, but the students bring a very wide variety of levels of geographical understanding. Almost all students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in geography in the first

three years at the school, and by the end of Year 9 have achieved a broad and balanced understanding of the subject.

147. Teaching is good overall some is very good. The four teachers of geography are all well-qualified, highly committed, and skilled at teaching students of different ages and the whole range of abilities. These strengths enable them to make the subject interesting and varied. However, the potential for geography to contribute to an understanding of citizenship has not been strongly developed yet. For example in Year 10, a good study of the reasons for the location of a car factory linked with students' developing understanding of industry, but did not develop citizenship themes.
148. Subject leadership is very good. The head of department leads a strong team and is a good role model for younger teachers. Programmes of study are well prepared, and lesson planning is good. Resources including textbooks are up-to-date, attractive and well used. In all the geography classrooms, the walls are full of examples of interesting, varied and relevant student work.
149. Since the last inspection, the department has been strengthened by the recruitment of two newly qualified teachers of geography, who both contribute to the variety and quality of the teaching. The department now has an excellent balance of youth and experience, and all four teachers contribute to the success of this very good department.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching secures a positive response from students, who achieve well
 - A short GCSE course has been introduced successfully for all Year 10 students
 - Marking of students' work is regular though some is not sufficiently informative.
 - Students make insufficient use of ICT during lessons
150. The GCSE results of the relatively small number of Year 11 students who opted for the examination course in 2003 matched national averages and were a significant improvement on the results for 2002. For the current Year 11 students, a small number have opted for a GCSE course and other students take religious education as part of a modular course. Their standards are broadly average although some GCSE students are working towards high grades. The current Year 10 students are reaching above average standards at this stage of the course. For example, many students have a sound understanding of the links between Christian belief and medical ethics. In Years 7 to 9, students' standards are above the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus. For example, many students understand how Buddhists might make moral decisions. Boys and girls both respond positively to the teaching and usually reach similar standards, but there are occasions when weak writing skills limit the progress of some boys.
151. On entry to the school, students' standards are broadly average. They achieve well because of the effective teaching, the good degree of challenge in lessons and their positive attitudes to learning. Because of their good achievement, many Year 10 students evaluate Christian teaching about discrimination and prejudice, and understand that some Christians hold different viewpoints on these topics. Students with special educational need achieve well because they are motivated by the subject and are fully involved in lessons.
152. Teaching is good overall. Teachers effectively link their very good subject knowledge to students' interests and experiences and provide a good element of intellectual challenge. A variety of learning activities is used to sustain lesson pace and help students develop literacy and thinking skills. Effective class management secures a positive response and involvement

in learning by all students. Teachers make very effective use of new technology in delivering their lessons but students themselves do not have enough opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning in religious education. Assessment is satisfactory although some marking does not give sufficient guidance to students as to how they can improve their work.

153. The leadership and management are effective, and have resulted in a good range of improvements since the last inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

The quality of provision in design and technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teaching is good overall and on occasion very good contributing well to very positive student attitudes and effective learning
- ICT is very well used by teachers and by students, particularly for coursework.
- Design and make activities do not always fully motivate the boys in Years 7 to 9.
- The teaching of control in Years 7 and 9 is insufficiently challenging.

Commentary

154. Standards on entry to the school are variable and below the national average overall. Standards rise steadily and by the time students reach the end of Year 9 they are broadly in line with the national average. Whilst systems for recording and monitoring pupils' progress are very good the method of assessment overestimates students' attainment. Overall achievement is good. Girls perform significantly better than boys. Students with SEN are well integrated in lessons and make the same progress as other students.
155. Students learn to design and make using a wide range of materials well in years 7 and 8. In Year 9 students specialise in three out of the five areas. Electronics, mechanisms and structures are appropriately taught. Control is not taught well in Year 7, it is insufficient just to teach students to use computer control packages. In resistant materials lessons, there is good emphasis on marking out and making accurately but some power hand-tools are used inappropriately. Too many of the design and make exercises are based on topics which are of little interest to boys.
156. In 2003, the GCSE examination results were above the national average with almost two thirds of students obtaining A* - C grades. Students perform best in food and textile technologies. Girls performed significantly better than boys. The recently introduced manufacturing course is being discontinued. The new course in systems and control has started well. In 2003, one boy took the GCSE examination and obtained a B grade. Standards in the lessons observed were good overall. Achievement is good.
157. All students take the subject in Years 10 and 11 and about one in ten take more than one GCSE course. There is very good emphasis on learning making skills and working accurately. Very good use is made of ICT to present work, store and present digital images, analyse results and research topics on the Internet.
158. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and sometimes very good. All specialist teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and plan lessons well. Topics are introduced well in lessons and teachers expect students to produce high quality work. Teachers use good course materials and give individual students good help and advice in practical activities. They

demonstrate work well. As a result, students' attitudes are very positive and they are eager to learn.

159. The leadership and management of the faculty are very good. The head of the faculty is very well supported by the managers of the food and textile areas. Changes since the last inspection are good. Standards have been maintained and achievement made more uniform. The quality of teaching and learning has been improved.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Provision in art is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards overall are well above national expectations by the end of Year 9, and well above the national average overall by the end of Year 11. The 2003 GCSE results were exceptionally good.
- Students' achievement is very good in all years.
- Teaching and learning are generally very good, and there is some excellent teaching.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good, but the monitoring of teaching is less well developed.
- The department makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.
- The lack of ICT resources prevents National Curriculum and examination requirements from being fully met.

Commentary

160. The department offers a good range of aspects of art and contextual studies in all years, including the use of a wide range of media, and work in both two and three dimensions. The 2003 GCSE results were a significant improvement on the previous year, with the number of A* to C grades being well above the national average, and predictions are for above average results in 2004. The standard of girls' work is better than that of boys, but the difference is not quite as great as that nationally in the subject. Students with special needs and the gifted and talented do particularly well, because of the individual care and guidance that the department bestows, and the visual practical nature of the subject.
161. Inspection evidence confirms that by the end of Year 9 standards overall are above the national expectation, and well above average by the end of Year 11. For example, using one point perspective, Year 9 students create drawings of rows of interesting houses, using appropriate research from observation, paintings and photographs. All are willing to persevere with some difficult spatial concepts, and most are able to use the rules of perspective well. The resulting drawings are generally above that expected for their age. In a Year 11 lesson students work individually on a wide variety of projects using interesting two and three dimensional media, including, clay work, graphics, and stained glass. There is a lively purposeful atmosphere and the spirit of the art GCSE is encapsulated in the aims and objectives of the tasks. The finished art work is rich and colourful and of a high standard.
162. Students' achievement is very good in all years, and across the wide attainment range students are working up to their individual capabilities. Progress is very good through the years, often from below average experience of the subject on entry to the school. For example, special needs students are quick to understand the idea of using hot or cold colours to convey mood or emotions because the teacher presents the task extremely well, and more able students achieve above expected standards when making animal drawings based on observation and high quality photographs. Their work shows very good achievement through a clear understanding of proportion and the use of texture and tone to convey form. The department makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development through links with local

artists, visits to art galleries, and the many curricular links with environmental, social and moral considerations promoted through project themes.

163. Teaching is never less than good and often very good. There is some excellent teaching in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and this promotes interest and good learning patterns. They are very enthusiastic role models, and give very generously of their time to students at all attainment levels. For example, when painting a still-life, students soon grasp the idea of mixing and grading colours, because the teacher gives very good visual guidance when demonstrating the process. Their progress and achievement during the lesson are very good, not only because they concentrate well, but because they have benefited from the teacher's sequential presentation of the use of the art elements.
164. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is clarity of vision, a strong sense of purpose, and high aspirations for success in all areas of the department's work. However, the monitoring of other teachers in the department is underdeveloped as are the use of national data for the assessment and evaluation of standards, and the monitoring of schemes of work. Development plans are good, and include plans to develop ICT resources to more closely meet National Curriculum and examination requirements and to raise attainment even further. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards of work and the quality of teaching has risen. Boys are now achieving higher overall standards, and time for the subject has improved.

Drama

Provision in drama is **good**

Strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment in Years 10 and 11 and achievement overall
- Teaching and learning
- The expertise of the head of department
- The consistently good examination results over time
- The need to refine the assessment system , defining success criteria and levels in all topics, and thus to increase the role of pupil self- assessment
- The development of better curriculum links to English which will enable drama to play a full role in the speaking and listening element of National Curriculum assessment

165. The GCSE results have been consistently above the national average over the last four years.
166. Standards in lessons and work seen are at the national average in Years 7 – 9, with good levels of achievement. Standards are above the national average in Years 10 and 11, and students show very good achievement. Good work was seen with Year 7 students where their bubble and enthusiasm was effectively harnessed, and they produced effective work using basic drama skills which built on the warm-up exercises. Year 10 students were producing very good work in dramatic choral speech using a poem on Aids, with another group demonstrating very good characterisation in a devised piece concerning drink and driving. Astute analytical skills were being developed as students matured. The attainment and achievement of students with special needs were as good as their peers', and since students always worked at their own level, the abler always worked at an appropriate standard.
167. Teaching and learning were both good at all levels. In the best lessons, relationships were very good, and a collaborative atmosphere was built up in which students felt secure enough to take risks in front of their peers. The head of department has a high level of expertise which supports pupil development well, and very good planning, preparation and target setting ensured that students knew where they were going and how they were to get there. Organisation and management were effective and efficient, linking high expectations with a

relaxed atmosphere. Students were seen learning through varied practical experiences that involved skill development, observation and analysis, experiment, working with others, negotiation and collaboration and progressive refinement.

168. Leadership is very good. The head of department is a powerful teacher with a strong vision and a real commitment to success. Management is efficient, and very good support is given to non- specialist colleagues. She has a clear view of necessary developments such as better links with English and the role of drama in the National Curriculum speaking and listening strand. There is a broad curriculum balancing skill development, text work and practical experience while laying the foundation for work in Years 10 and 11. There are excellent links to a professional theatre, including some work in school by professional actors. Assessment is good, with self- assessment built in; it needs refinement to draw closer links with success criteria and levels in all topics.
169. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good; the one issue identified has been fully resolved, and the strengths identified then remain so.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good at all levels
 - Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in Years 7-9
 - Relationships with students are good and reflect the enthusiasm of staff
 - The impact of the department on the broadening of pupil cultural horizons as shown by the gamelan work, the steel band and the samba band
 - ICT is well used in the GCSE course and developing in Years 7-9
 - Assessment does not link National Curriculum criteria and levels in all topics and there is limited use of pupil self- assessment
170. The proportion of students gaining A*-C grades was close to the national average in 2003, results in 2002 were well above the national average, and over a four-year period they have been above it.
171. Standards in lessons and work seen were at the national average, and achievement was good. The best work seen included gamelan work with Year 9 where an exciting musical experience was provided for youngsters who were playing a real Balinese gamelan – part of initiatives to broaden cultural horizons. The result was magical and intensely moving. Ensemble is well used with Year 10 and 11 students to improve the standards of all, and score- making software is very well used to link sound and symbol. Students with special needs achieve as well as their peers, and more able students are appropriately stretched. Good strategies are in place to build self-esteem with those boys for whom this is a problem, and consequently all students have equal access to success.
172. Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in Years 7-9. The best lessons are characterised by very good relationships which help students feel secure and to take risks; teacher expertise is at a high level, and high expectations and challenge are regular features. Planning, preparation and clear target setting are norms, and link to efficient class management while maintaining a relaxed atmosphere. Effective learning is evident through listening and analysis, skill development, experiment, through the use of musical ensemble and above all through doing and refining the work in progress.
173. Leadership is very good; the head of department is a committed enthusiast who is determined to build a very effective department. She works very well with her colleagues, and management is quietly efficient. The curriculum is broad and balanced, and a strong feature is

the way in which cultural horizons are broadened. A very good foundation has been laid in assessment, although is not consistently applied in all topic areas in terms of showing student improvement against National Curriculum criteria and levels. Student self-assessment is also less used. Technology already uses the sequencing facility on all keyboards, and the recent improvement in resources including both sequencing and score-making software has provided a very good basis for further development. Extra-curricular music and instrumental teaching are now strong, providing an exciting extension to the curriculum for a significant number of students.

174. Progress since the last inspection has been very good; all the issues have been effectively addressed, the last one being ICT, where the department now has up-to-date workstations in the department with sequencing and score-making software; it is thus very well placed to activate exciting developments.

Physical education

The provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The proportion of students attaining A* to C grade passes at GCSE is improving and, in 2002 and 2003, was above the national average.
- Good teaching and learning, particularly in Years 7 to 9, result in good progress.
- The majority of students achieve well by the end of Years 9 and 11 in relation to their capabilities and attainment on entry.
- The very good attitudes of the great majority of students help promote a very positive atmosphere in lessons.
- Leadership and management are good and there is the capacity for further improvement.
- Not all schemes of work refer sufficiently well to the development of students' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and the use of ICT.

Commentary

175. Results in the GCSE examination were above the national average in 2002 and in 2003 remained so. The small number of girls entered for the course does not make it possible to comment meaningfully on gender differences.
176. In lessons seen in Year 9 standards are average for the majority. Achievement is good because standards on entry were below what was expected for students' ages. In netball, girls are improving their individual skills, and the quality of their teamwork skills is secure. Movement into space and movement off the ball, for example, are quite effective and passes are generally accurate. In rugby union, boys have secure passing skills and are developing well their use of the loop and switch techniques. A significant minority, the more capable, have good all round individual and teamwork skills. On the whole, good quality teaching and learning has led to good improvement for the great majority of boys and girls.
177. In lessons seen in the Year 11 compulsory course standards are average in games. In rugby union, boys have secure all-round individual and teamwork skills and in association football a significant number, the more capable, have above average standards. In girls' health-related fitness lessons, the majority have a secure understanding of the principles and procedures for warm-up and cool-down and a good awareness of the effects of exercise on the body. In GCSE basketball, a majority of boys is working at practical levels commensurate with A* to C grade passes. Individual skills, for example shooting techniques, are well developed and accurate passing and tactical awareness enable small-sided games to be played at an appropriate level. No girls' practical lessons were seen. A scrutiny of a sample of students' theory shows most boys and girls are working well and making good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of, for example, factors affecting performance in sport.

Some make good use of ICT to present their coursework project. The achievement of the majority of Year 11 students continues to be good because of their very good attitudes and good quality teaching and learning.

178. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and results in good progress for students. Across all years teachers have a good command of the activities being taught and there is a consistent approach as regards standards of behaviour. The good quality teaching is typified by pace, purpose, progression and challenge. Learning objectives are shared with students, thus they know what is expected of them. In a Year 9 rugby union lesson, for example, students were fully involved in small groups to develop and improve their use passing techniques and in a Year 11 basketball lesson students were involved in peer coaching when developing their use of the set shot. Teachers circulate well in lessons and their effective use of praise and constructive criticism makes students aware of their capabilities. On odd occasion, however, there are insufficient structured opportunities for students to be involved in peer evaluation and coaching – this would have deepened their knowledge and understanding even further in a Year 9 netball lesson. Insufficient use is made of ICT to support students' learning. The quality of marking of GCSE theory work is consistent and students are told what they need to do to make further progress. Assessment procedures, including the effectiveness of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, are good.
179. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Issues for improvement have been identified; teaching and learning are monitored, as is performance data. Not all schemes of work support sufficiently well students' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and use of ICT. Good extra-curricular provision throughout the year broadens students' learning experience and enables the more capable to represent the school in competitive fixtures. Approximately 40 per cent of students took part in some form of extra-curricular provision during the previous school year. As a result, a number of students have achieved representative honours at district and county level in a range of sports. Netball teams have been successful in district competitions. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection has been good.
180. Students in Years 7 to 9, along with GCSE students in Years 10 and 11, have access to two hours quality sporting provision per week. This includes both timetabled provision as well as extra-curricular activities. Those taking the GCSE course benefit from the greater time for high quality sports activities. All other Years 10-11 students have the compulsory physical education course though can continue their sports involvement through the good range of extra-curricular activities.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Health and social care

The quality of provision is **good**

Strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well despite some having limited basic skills
- Teaching is well organised and effective
- Good use is made of outside visits and work experience to provide a realistic context for learning
- Given the emphasis on research and coursework, there is less than expected use of ICT to help improve students' work

Commentary

181. Recent standards in the applied GCSE were in line with national average and, given that most of the students start the course with lower than average attainment, this represents good achievement.
182. Standards seen in Year 10 are well below national average in terms of basic literacy and numeracy skills and a capacity to work independently. Even so, most students, all girls, draw effectively on their own experience to better understand the skills and qualities needed in the caring industry. Standards in Year 11 are noticeably better and close to national average. Those students have a sound understanding of health issues and a developing appreciation of human growth and development. Most can demonstrate secure literacy skills in coursework though have some difficulty with graphical representation. ICT is available for the course although is underused by the girls for their coursework.
183. Overall, Year 11 students made good progress and are achieving well. Much of this can be attributed to the good teaching that contains some very good features. The teachers have a strong class presence and good behaviour management skills necessary to ensure that students make sufficient progress. Relationships are positive although a firm but constructive approach was needed in the Year 10 class that contained a number of challenging girls. The course leader is well informed and organises vocational placements and visits that effectively complement the class teaching. Assessment provides clear guidance showing how students can meet the required standards.
184. The course is well managed and considerable effort is made to provide an attractive learning environment with some access to ICT.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision for citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Although there are some strengths in students' work, overall standards are below those expected at the end of Years 9 and 11;
 - Some students have very good opportunities to work in the school and community-based activities;
 - The students' learning in citizenship has not yet been assessed;
 - The school has identified the contribution that several subjects make to students' citizenship education.
185. Students attain well in certain aspects of citizenship. For example, many develop effective skills in working independently on their own and in groups, and use a range of information sources when they research particular moral and social issues. A weak aspect of attainment is their knowledge of England's legal system and the working of government. Following a special day for Year 9 students to learn about the misuse of drugs, about 40 students work with pupils in nearby primary schools on this topic. This work involves them giving a presentation to the primary pupils' parents and carers. Within the school, a small group of students are trained as counsellors to support other students especially with issues of personal relationships. All students are involved in the democratic process and bringing about change in the school through the school and year councils.
186. There are only a small number of lessons each week that have a specific focus on citizenship. For example, in a Year 11 lesson that reviewed students' work experience, teaching and

learning were very good because the brisk, purposeful work was well matched to students' needs and secured their interest and active involvement.

187. The school has mapped the contribution that some subjects make to students' citizenship education but this does not yet include the contributions of English and drama. Science has identified many ways in which its work contributes to citizenship. History makes some substantial contributions, but students are not usually aware that the work contributes towards their citizenship education. The contribution of most subjects to citizenship is not included in their curricular planning.
188. The school intends to assess students' progress in citizenship during the current school year. The school has not reported to parents on students' standards in citizenship as is required. Management has been slow to address the introduction of this National Curriculum subject. The school has yet to undertake the detailed work required to ensure that the citizenship curriculum is developed effectively.

Personal, social and health education

(Sampled as no specific lessons were taught during the inspection week)

189. PSHE is taught through different subjects, tutor time each morning, assemblies, the fortnightly tutorial lessons in Years 7 and 8, and the modular programme of careers education, health education and religious education in Year 11. In addition, special events and activities contribute to PSHE, including activities week. Overall, the school has maintained the satisfactory provision reported at the last inspection with strengths in particular aspects such as:

- sex and relationships education in Year 11;
- careers education in Year 8;
- students gaining practical knowledge and skills to live healthily and deal with spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues;
- helping students to understand and manage responsibly a wide range of relationships;
- encouraging students to believe in their ability to succeed.

A weakness is that the school has not used national guidance as a basis for checking the overall quality of provision between Years 7 and 11. The time is not used well in a significant minority of morning tutor sessions.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B	
		School	England	School	England
ART	4	100	88	100	38
BIOLOGY	20	65	77	15	31
BUSINESS STUDIES	4	50	85	0	26
CHEMISTRY	5	100	83	0	26
DESIGN	4	100	84	25	29
ENGLISH	5	100	92	20	49
FRENCH	5	40	88	0	36
GEOGRAPHY	16	88	88	31	20
HISTORY	10	90	91	0	44
IT	12	83	74	8	13
MATHS	13	85	74	23	29
MEDIA	5	100	91	20	33
MUSIC	2	50	87	0	35
PHILOSOPHY	6	83	88	0	32
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	3	100	84	33	25
PHYSICS	4	100	80	75	33
PSYCHOLOGY	9	100	74	11	29
SOCIOLOGY	3	100	78	33	32
THEATRE	5	80	91	40	33

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B	
		School	England	School	England
ART	4	100	96.6	100	51.1
BIOLOGY	7	100	92.6	0	42.1
BUSINESS STUDIES	8	100	96.4	0	35.8
CHEMISTRY	1	100	95.1	0	52.7
DESIGN	4	100	95.9	25	36.7
ENGLISH	12	100	98.4	16.7	44.5
FRENCH	1	100	97.7	0	57.8
GEOGRAPHY	10	90	97.5	30	44.4
HISTORY	12	100	97.7	41.7	49.6
IT	9	88.9	91.2	0	24.9
MATHS	3	100	94.9	33.3	59.4
MEDIA	4	100	94.9	25	37.6
MUSIC	1	100	96.6	0	44.8
PHILOSOPHY	5	100	97.9	0	51.8
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	6	100	95	33.3	30.7
PHYSICS	2	100	93.6	0	47.6
PSYCHOLOGY	8	100	94	37.5	39.2
THEATRE	5	100	98.6	20	41.3

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE	4	100	75.5	25	25.3	3	2
LEISURE & RECREATION	3	67	73.6	33	25.5	2.3	2.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan lessons well and engage all students actively in lessons.
 - Teachers' knowledge of the set texts is strong; they have a good knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses.
 - The proportion of students gaining higher grade passes, (A and B grades), in the most recent examinations has been below the national average.
 - In recent years all students completing the course have gained a graded pass.
190. Small numbers of students take the AS and A-level courses in English literature. There are currently four students in Year 13 and eleven in Year 12. In each of the two previous years twelve students have completed the course to A-level. The English department provides helpful teaching support outside the normal timetable for small numbers of students wishing to sit the GCSE examination.
191. Results at GCE A-level have been near but below the national average in the examinations taken in 2002 and 2003. This is similar to the situation reported in the previous inspection of 1997. In both of the years all students were successful in gaining a graded pass but the proportion gaining a higher grade (A or B) pass was below the national average. The performance of boys was better than that of girls in 2002. The interim grades gained in the AS examinations in 2002 and 2003 indicate similar levels of performance.
192. The observations of lessons and of written work in the sixth form show that work in progress reflects standards in line with those nationally. Students in Year 12, studying Chaucer, showed skill and enjoyment in reading aloud their own paraphrases of sections of *The Miller's Tale*. They showed sensitivity to the language structure of the original text as well as a detailed understanding of the meaning. The students in Year 13 have an appropriately detailed textual knowledge of *The Merchant of Venice*. They were able to identify the main themes within the play and to select appropriate evidence to support arguments when discussing the concepts of justice and mercy.
193. Achievement of the students in the current sixth form is good. All are moving forward from above average passes in GCSE English and English literature as a result of purposeful well-planned teaching. Students show positive attitudes to the course. The school's internal analysis of examination performance in 2003 has been helpful in identifying the levels of achievement or underachievement of individual students. This has revealed unsatisfactory achievement by some students in 2003 caused mainly by inadequate preparation for one of the examination units.
194. Teaching is very good. Lessons are prepared very carefully to involve students actively in discussion, argument, reading, thinking, note-taking and writing. As a result, students learn well. They are encouraged to have the confidence to challenge teachers' observations when discussing important themes, such as the meaning of 'justice' within a Shakespeare text. After the thorough marking of essays, teachers invite students to make a written response should they need guidance or advice to improve standards. Teachers are very much aware of students' strengths and of any particular learning needs they may have.

195. The leadership and management of the sixth form English are good. The incoming head of department is using the school structures effectively to analyse students' attainment in the AS and A-level examinations. In particular, there is recognition that there could be improvements in the setting of challenging but realistic targets for students. Examples of marked essays show that assessment is thorough and rigorous.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

196. There is no specific policy for literacy across the sixth form although individual subjects help students improve their technical language and higher level analytical and evaluative skills in the range of written work required for Advanced level work.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge supports good teaching.
- The subject is increasingly popular and has a high retention rate.
- Students do not use ICT enough to support their learning.
- Students are reluctant to engage in open dialogue where exchange of mathematical ideas could take place.

Commentary

197. Student numbers have been small but results at A-level in recent years have been above national average. The current Year 13 provisional results at AS-level are very good; numbers have significantly improved, with the overwhelming majority achieving results in excess of expectations. The department exercise an inclusive recruitment policy at A-level; all students' needs are well met including those with modest GCSE grades and those able to pursue further mathematics.

198. Standards of work seen reflect the improving level of overall attainment and are in line with national averages. Written work of students in Year 13 is of a high standard with note-taking forming a prominent feature of their work. This provides a very good resource for revision and reflects the mature attitude students have towards the subject. Very good work was seen in the various modules with sound grasp of exponentials and logarithms, and work on statistics was particularly good. The work in books showed clear evidence of model examples, regular testing, and rigorous marking including useful guidance on any incorrect work. Students in Year 12, whilst only a short way into their course, are making good progress with appropriate coverage of the work. A good basis was given to the number system, moving through elements of algebra with a sound development of trigonometry. The overwhelming majority of students intend to complete the full two-year course to A-level. No evidence was seen of the use of computers in lessons or in students' work.

199. Teaching is good. Teachers plan their lessons well and display very good subject knowledge and students are well prepared for examinations. This resulted in an equally positive response from students, as a consequence lesson objective were soundly grasped. Students were able to explain the reasoning for using particular techniques with links to prior learning; for example, students recognised the various applications for integration. However students remained reluctant to initiate or develop open dialogue where exchange of mathematical ideas could more fully take place.

200. The subject is very well led; numbers are increasing and now represent a considerable proportion of the current sixth form, a testimony to improvements made. Students speak well of the support they are given and the competency of the teaching.

Mathematics across the curriculum

201. In subjects which require numeracy skills, students cope well with the demands. Teachers ensure that they provide appropriate support for the development of numeracy in subjects such as physics, business studies, geography and biology. Students are competent in using statistical models to analyse and represent data and find applying their knowledge of mechanics very supportive in physics.

SCIENCE

Provision for biology is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising, particularly in Year 12
 - Teaching is good overall with particular strengths in teachers' specialist knowledge
 - Students with very good attitudes to work
 - The relatively new course leader has improved the work schemes
 - There is still a lack of sufficient monitoring and reflection in order to share the best practice
202. Standards have been below national average and the number of students completing a full GCE A-level has declined until last year. Standards improved a little in 2003 and students achieved in line with expectations.
203. Students in Year 13 show developing understanding of theory and classification and are largely able to use technical language in their work. Students can produce good quality models of cells undergoing division for example, although higher level analytical and evaluative skills are less strong to gain the highest grades. Practical work is evident although less developed. Standards in Year 12 are stronger and particularly in one class, and students show a more secure understanding of theory and the higher attaining students present their ideas well. Students make good progress and this can be attributed to the better teaching in those classes.
204. Teaching is good overall. Where it is strongest, as in Year 12 work on disease, the well-informed and enthusiastic teaching inspires students to produce high quality work. The classroom atmosphere is positive and students are keen to learn. Other good practice includes stimulus cards to help students discuss ideas and modelling activities that enable students to work together and learn from each other. Less strong teaching lacked exemplar material and tended to be teacher dominated. There is insufficient focus on developing skills in essay work, although in other ways teachers prepare students well for examination. Coursework is well marked and identifies areas for development and offers students suggestions on how to improve.
205. All students said they enjoy the course and appreciate the greater opportunities provided by a widening range of resources for independent research and presentation work, particularly where it uses ICT.
206. Management of the department is satisfactory. The head of biology has been in post almost one year. Much time has been spent developing schemes of work. Examination data analysis is carried out in discussion with the head of faculty. Meeting time has been allocated but no biology meetings have taken place yet this term. Extra-curricular activities have been planned and some have taken place. Teaching has not yet been monitored although the subject recognises the need to evaluate further and strengthen provision.
207. At the last inspection standards in biology were above national for A-C grades but there has been a fall in standards since then. Current standards are beginning to regain those levels

found in the last inspection as a result of improved provision and so progress has been satisfactory.

208. The two other main science subjects were sampled during the inspection.
209. **Physics.** Teaching is good. Teachers run lessons with enthusiasm, students are interested and take on growing responsibility for their own learning. Achievement of the small number of students in 2003 was good. The number of Year 12 students choosing physics in 2003 has increased.
210. **Chemistry.** Teaching is good. The small number of candidates in Years 12 and 13 achieved above expectations in 2003.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision of ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching of ICT is consistently good
 - Current standards at A2 level are above the national average
 - Students' current achievement is good
 - Attainment in 2003 was below average
211. The most recent examination results in this subject show that attainment in GCE Advanced level was below the national average but students achieved appropriately given their modest GCSE results.
212. Current standards are in line with the national average in Year 12 and above the national average in Year 13 reflecting considerable improvement over the 2003 results. Students have developed good techniques, including mind-mapping and brainstorming to identify key features of an implementation plan for a new ICT system within an organisation. They draw upon a range of resources to analyse including the Internet, textbooks and company materials. A good technical understanding of the subject supports their explanations.
213. The current groups of students started this subject with high prior attainment in ICT or mathematics. Written work over time shows a good depth of study of databases and the context of their use in organisations. Male and female students are each on course to attain within the higher grade range and this represents good achievement overall. Good progress is aided by well-paced and well-resourced lessons, good quality and range of information sources and high expectations.
214. The teaching of ICT is consistently good. The teacher has good specialist knowledge and prepares lessons in detail. Lesson structure balances teacher input with discussion and opportunities for independent learning. There is expert summing up of what has been learnt each lesson and good questioning techniques which reveal that pupils are making good progress in the key areas of the subject. The teacher draws out criteria and issues during discussion with students and captures key points on a second whiteboard. Students write in a structured way about the market potential of ICT facilities within an organisation linking services to technical considerations. Students draw upon different sources of information and demonstrate good skills of analysis, identifying key points and developing an argument.
215. The management of the subject is good. Coursework requirements have been well interpreted and converted to a rigorous teaching programme. Resources for teaching and learning in this subject are good. An ICT network with Internet links promotes student research.
216. Assessment, and feedback to support learning, are well developed. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection.

ICT across the curriculum

217. The school does not participate in the national key skills although increasing numbers of students make use of their ICT skills within their chosen subjects. Resources are generally good with sixth form students usually able to gain access to facilities in private study time. However, the school has no co-ordinated policy for ICT in the sixth form.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A popular subject with good results at A-level in most years
- All teaching is at least good and some is very good
- Students are highly committed and work well
- Fieldwork both in UK and abroad is used well to support learning
- Subject leadership is very good
- Extended student oral contributions are too limited

Commentary

218. GCE A-level standards are above national average in most years.

219. Standards seen in the inspection reflect the recent above average results. All students, without any exceptions, were highly committed and working well. This is particularly praiseworthy in a department which is willing to welcome any student with five good passes at GCSE: no other 'barriers' are in place.

220. Achievement in geography in the sixth form is good with many students starting the course with modest GCSE qualifications. Geography is a popular and successful choice for boys and girls and this is based partly on good work in previous years in the school, and on the enterprising field study in southern France.

221. Teaching is good overall and some was very good. All three teachers are well informed and have high expectations. Their challenging teaching enables students to develop higher level thinking skills and secure knowledge and understanding. Students are prepared well for examination and know how to improve their work. Learning takes place in a constructive and positive atmosphere with good working relationships with the teacher though there are fewer than average opportunities for extended student discussion. Interestingly, during the inspection many students were rather vague about where was being studied as world maps and the globe were not prominent.

222. Subject leadership is very good. The head of department is a senior examiner at A-level, and helps his colleagues and his students have a clear understanding of examination requirements.

223. Since the last inspection, recruitment of two young geography graduates has increased the variety of lessons, and there is now much improved use of ICT. The older textbooks have been replaced – the students now have very good up-to-date and interesting textbooks, which they use well. The subject has made good improvement since the last inspection

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and leads to effective learning for most students.
- Students' achievement at A-Level is good.
- The monitoring of student progress is underdeveloped.
- The care for students is good and they become confident learners.

224. Results in the 2003 A-Level examinations were above average and continue a rising trend. All the students were female and a third of them obtained higher grades. Results in the 2003 AS-level were average and below those for 2002. Female students greatly outnumbered male students on the AS-level course. Students achieved well in the 2003 A-level examination gaining grades above those expected of them based upon their results in their GCSE subjects. Students generally achieved the grades expected of them in the 2003 AS-Level examination and almost half of the female students achieved better than expected.

225. The standards seen in the inspection are above average in Years 12 and 13. In Year 12, students describe a key study on obedience and evaluate it effectively. In Year 13, students are able to summarise and explain a wide range of research relating to human relationships and theories of sleep with a high degree of maturity. This reflected good progress in the course with most students achieving well against their prior GCSE attainment.

226. Teaching overall is good in both years and was characterised by a good knowledge of psychology and good planning that included opportunities for students to work independently and collaboratively. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on the importance of understanding examination terminology, students were first expected to identify concepts and ideas that they were unsure of before embarking on collaborative group work. Contributions from the group helped students to learn well from each other and make good progress. Not only did they come to understand key terms such as 'explain' and 'describe' they also filled vital gaps in their knowledge and understanding for the concepts they had previously identified. The teacher also created a safe environment for students within which they felt confident to communicate their ideas to the rest of the class. Ongoing assessment in lessons is good and whilst assessment over time is used to monitor the progress of students, it is not fully developed or geared to the grade level criteria used for external examinations.

227. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The new teacher in charge of the subject has a clear vision for raising standards by enabling her students to become confident independent and self-evaluative learners. Although she has only been in post for a short time she is already having an impact on students' achievement and is taking steps to place the monitoring of student progress on a more formal footing.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

The quality of provision in design and technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Good teaching ensures students are well motivated and make good progress
- Opportunities to work independently on innovative projects are good.
- While teaching groups are small the longer-term future of provision is at risk
- The course does not provide for a wider range of design and technology options courses.

Commentary

228. Standards on entry vary from year to year and are below the national average overall. Students take a course in product design. In 2003, the GCE examination results were broadly average, with one out of the four students obtaining a B grade. All four students passed with a minimum of an E grade. The examination results at the end of Year 12, obtained by students with lower prior attainment, were similar. Girls perform better than boys. Standards and achievement in the lessons observed were good.
229. There is very good emphasis on developing metal working skills. In a very good lesson in Year 12 students were seen learning to use a variety of hand and power tools to make a good range of metal products. Many of the projects undertaken in Year 13 are innovative and give students the opportunities to show flare. Students were seen working independently to design a variety of lamps, a combined CD and DVD holder and a can crusher. One of the lamps was based on an art nouveau design and took the shape of a branch of a tree. The student had many good ideas for making this complex shape. Students have very positive attitudes and make good progress.
230. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have a very secure knowledge and the ability to motivate and inspire students. Relationships are very good. Teachers give very effective help and advice during practical activities. The use of ICT to present work, analyse data and research topics on the Internet is very good.
231. Leadership and management are very good. The two teachers work well together and are keen to improve standards. The number of students taking the subject is small. The curriculum does not provide opportunities for students to learn advanced food and textile technologies. Changes since the last inspection are good and the progress of students has been improved.

Land and environment

Provision for land and environment is **very good**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good;
 - Relationships are encouraging and supportive, and students are keen to work hard;
 - The school's farm is an excellent learning resource;
 - The course provides good opportunities for students to develop and use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills;
 - Students have the opportunity to work in a wide range of vocational contexts.
232. In 2003, the results for this GNVQ Intermediate level course were broadly average, with all students passing and about one third obtaining merits or distinctions. The current group of students are on track to reach similar standards by next summer. Students collect and analyse a wide range of data about the care and growth of chickens, and use spreadsheets

233. effectively as part of this work. They write good quality reports for their assignments about Colchester Zoo. Students develop a good understanding of different soil types and the effects of these on rural enterprises.
234. Students join the course with GCSE results that range from well below average to above average, although most are below average. All students achieve well. A few students with special educational needs achieve particularly well. The course is well matched to the wide range of students' needs, both academic and personal.
235. Teaching overall is very good. The supportive and encouraging relationships teachers have with students create a positive ethos for learning and secure a very good response. Effective monitoring and support for individual students ensure that work is well matched to their differing learning needs and that all are challenged by the tasks. Expert subject knowledge enables the teacher to make explicit the vocational relevance of the learning and teachers' explanations are clear and result in good understanding. Students are given clear feedback and advice about how to improve their standards.
236. The leadership and management are very good. The farm is used by students to study the commercial production of chickens, and the students run their own businesses using plants grown on the farm. The farm is used as a resource by other subjects, especially science, and has received a very good number of county and national awards for its conservation work. The students visit several commercial farms and nurseries and learn practical skills, including those of working with large animals. There is a 'compact' agreement with two local agricultural colleges so that if students pass the GNVQ course they are guaranteed a place on an appropriate college course.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art

Provision in art is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards generally, are well above the national average.
- Students achieve extremely well in all areas of the subject, and in relation to their prior attainment.
- Teaching is very good, and there is some excellent teaching. Courses are extremely well planned, presented, and linked to gallery visits.
- There is very good leadership and management.
- The lack of ICT and CAD resources in the department is holding back potential standards and achievement.
- Independent research is of high quality and this contributes effectively to the personal development of students.
- Student numbers are currently low in Year 13, this reduces diversity and the sharing of ideas.

Commentary

237. Students follow well-planned and delivered courses in AS and A2 GCE art and design, but as yet there are no vocational courses. Examination results are very good, and high grades are achieved. Standards overall, are well above the national average, but the number of students taking the subject has been too small to make any meaningful comparisons with national figures. However, significantly more students could take AS-level in 2004.

238. High standards of work were observed during the inspection in both years. Students are very keen to learn about art and design concepts and art movements. Year 12 students are working towards producing critical studies sketchbooks that are richly illustrated and annotated. They are inspired by the high standard of work produced by the previous year's AS group. Students have chosen to present the works of artists that relate to each other or contrast well, for example Constable and Turner. Year 13 students also compare the work of well known artists, looking for philosophical, political, and other links. They make reference to the styles and techniques of these artists and this influences their own work.
239. Practical work seen and discussed with students demonstrates high achievement and standards. Independent research for projects using a wide range of sources, including art galleries and the Internet, is particularly good, and this contributes effectively to the personal development of students. Work in progress reveals a very good standard of observational drawing, use of colour, and composition. Interesting textures using an impasto technique are particularly striking in the rich expressive oil painted landscapes by one student. Students work extremely well together and independently, and achievement is very good in relation to their individual capabilities.
240. The quality of teaching is very good, and there is some excellent teaching. Courses are well presented, and involve a wide range of aspects of the subject and links with artists and art movements. Teachers are very enthusiastic, they have a very good command of the subject and a good knowledge of the examination requirements and assessment criteria. There is an insistence on high standards of conduct and a very productive, purposeful atmosphere in lessons. Students are encouraged with high quality individual feedback, although the low student numbers in Year 13 reduces the opportunity to share ideas with a wider audience.
241. As with the main school, leadership and management of the department are very good. There is clarity of vision, a strong sense of purpose, and high aspirations for success in all areas of post-16 work. However, the lack of ICT and computer aided design resources in the department are holding back potential standards and achievement. Nevertheless there are very good plans in place to develop these resources. Improvements have been made since the previous inspection, and student numbers are increasing. This is now helping to develop valuable interaction, diversity of approach, and keener competition.

Drama/theatre studies

Provision for drama/theatre studies is **good**.

242. The subject was sampled during the inspection. Teaching and learning are very good, and standards are good. There are only two students in Year 13, but they showed astute awareness and high standards in their work on Berthold Brecht, and their understanding of Stanislavsky made comparison possible and accurate. Numbers are small but increasing.

Music

Provision for music is **good**

This subject was sampled during the inspection

243. The school provides positive support for the subject by allowing very small teaching groups. There is potential for future development. Standards match pupil abilities, and the full ability range evident lower down the school is not adequately represented at this level. The department is working hard to encourage more of the abler musicians to remain in the sixth form here in the future.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and show excellent attitudes to their work due to very good teaching;
- Leadership and management are very good;
- The timetable structure limits students' use of work placements to enrich learning;
- Students use ICT very well but its availability during lessons is limited.

Commentary

244. Results in 2003 for the AVCE examination (single award) were well in line with national expectations (low numbers make statistical comparisons invalid) with one of the five students entered gaining the top A grade and all passing.
245. Inspection evidence in lessons and work shows standards attained by students currently in Year13 are satisfactory in relation to national course expectations, and students of a fairly wide range of ability are making good progress. Year 12 students are attaining above national expectations at this early stage, evident in above average evaluations of one- to- one interactions with elderly clients in a local healthy living group. Year 13 students showed good team and communication skills in lessons and written reports of visits to local care settings. Students used ICT well to present word processed descriptions, but there were few analyses of health statistics using spreadsheets.
246. Results indicate good achievement from relatively low starting points at GCSE, in line with previous trends. Over three quarters of students achieved better in 2003 than predicted.
247. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, fostering excellent attitudes and commitment by students. Lessons were interesting and enjoyable, well matched to students' needs, so all, including an unsupported dyslexic student, made very good progress. Teachers' expert examples included topical anecdotes encouraging students to offer opinions without inhibition and remain fully engaged in tasks. Teachers helped students improve literacy skills very well through excellent topic booklets. Work was regularly marked and reviewed involving checklists and relevant targets for improvement.
248. Curriculum leadership and management of the subject are very good as the experienced staff work as an enthusiastic, well-knit team. The subject was not reported on in the last inspection. Points for improvement are: more availability and use of ICT by students in lessons to develop numeracy skills, and more regular work placements based on the good links with local care settings, given more flexible timetabling.

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

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