

INSPECTION REPORT

ST NICHOLAS CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Hartford, Northwich

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111450

Headteacher: Mr G Boyle

Lead inspector: Denis Pittman

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 26th March 2004

Inspection number: 259261

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

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Terms used in this report

*Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are at **Key Stage 3**, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are at **Key Stage 4** of their education. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the **sixth form**, in Years 12 and 13. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for pupils and students of all ages at school.*

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

*Inspectors judge the **standards** reached by pupils by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for pupils of the same age nationally. The pupils' **achievements** reflect whether they are doing well enough. These judgements take account of the educational **value added** over time. In this report, **similar schools** are defined as those with a comparable attainment at the end of Year 9 and Year 11*

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1215
School address:	Greenbank Lane Hartford Northwich Cheshire
Postcode:	CW8 1JW
Telephone number:	01606 75420
Fax number:	01606 784586
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Fenton
Date of previous inspection:	May 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Nicholas Catholic High School is an 11 – 18 voluntary aided mixed comprehensive school. It is situated about two miles from Northwich. There are 1215 students on roll with 207 students in the sixth form. The gender mix is reasonably balanced across the school but there are significantly more boys in Year 8. There is very little movement of students into or away from the school other than at the usual years. Students come from contrasting socio-economic backgrounds but they are overall above average. There is a very low number of students from a minority ethnic background and no student has English as a second language. The number of students on the special educational needs register is below average as is the number of students eligible for free school meals. The number of students with a Statement of Special Educational Need is average. Overall, standards of attainment on entry are above average. The school successfully acquired Business and Enterprise status in Sept. 2003. The school is part of a large campus with a variety of educational institutions, for example a special school and a college of further education. Some of the facilities, particularly for games, are shared.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
16976	Denis Pittman	Lead inspector	
13786	Susan Walsh	Lay inspector	
1407	Peter Scott	Team inspector	Mathematics (main school, sixth form)
12499	Marie Durkin	Team inspector	English as an additional language (EAL), English (main school, sixth form)
1779	David Leonard	Team inspector	Science (main school)
30690	Gordon Allison	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT) (main school, sixth form)
31129	Jeff Pickering	Team inspector	Art (main school)
23891	Peter Slape	Team inspector	Design technology (DT) (main school)
20497	Vernon Williams	Team inspector	History (main school, sixth form)
17404	Judith Tolley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages (MFL) (main school), French (sixth form)
22501	Sue Jones	Team inspector	Citizenship (main school), Music (main school)
7926	James Bowden	Team inspector	Special educational needs (SEN), Physical Education (main school)
29972	John Webster	Team inspector	Geography (main school, sixth form)
21866	David Tracey	Team inspector	Physics (sixth form), Chemistry (sixth form)
11913	Martin Howard	Team inspector	Psychology (sixth form)
19056	Graham Leech	Team inspector	Theatre studies (sixth form)
19851	Roger Lister	Team inspector	Business education (sixth form)

The inspection contractor was:

Independent School Inspection Services (ISIS)
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Nicholas is a very good school. **It provides a very good quality of education and gives very good value for money.** The prevailing ethos is caring and supportive, yet also based upon high expectations of performance. The leadership of the headteacher is very good – his vision and ambition have created a school that celebrates traditional Catholic values but is also innovative in promoting an ‘enterprise culture’ in the school. Overall standards achieved are well above average; this is when compared with national figures at the end of Years 9 and 11 and in the sixth form. Students achieve very well as the result of very good teaching. Students’ personal development is significantly enhanced by the very good quality of the support and guidance they receive. The staff shows a strong commitment to shared objectives of continuing improvement. Relationships are excellent; this is reflected in the high standards of behaviour of students and their developing maturity.

The school’s main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Results in tests and examinations are well above national averages and students’ overall achievement is very good.
- The leadership and management of the school are good. A climate of innovation, challenge, support and improvement has been successfully created.
- The overall quality of teaching is very good; this promotes very effective learning amongst students.
- Pastoral care is very strong and promotes very positive relationships within the school but the assessment of students’ progress is not sufficiently consistent in Years 7 to 9 to allow for its effective monitoring.
- The students’ behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good and excellent in the sixth form.
- The curriculum in citizenship is unsatisfactory.
- ICT is used well in some areas of the curriculum but lacks consistency of application in some subjects.
- The ethos and provision in the sixth form is very good.

The school has made good improvement since the last inspection. In terms of its academic performance, the national measures of progress (value added) show a pattern of sustained improvement. The quality of teaching has been improved and is a strength of the school. The school site has been significantly developed - this additional accommodation enhances and promotes a dynamic learning environment. New facilities are now provided in the business centre, library, the sixth form centre and an enlarged computing capability. The only key issue from the previous inspection, which needs further development, is that in relation to ICT across the curriculum.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Key: A -well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average

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

Overall achievement is very good. Standards are broadly above average on entry to the school, although there is the full spectrum of ability. Examination test results over time show continuing high standards and an improving trend. The school’s performance in National Curriculum tests, at the end

of Year 9, is significantly better than that of similar schools (top 5 per cent nationally). In most subjects, standards in GCSE examinations were well above average. However, results in German were significantly lower than would be expected. Standards seen in lessons in Years 7 to 9 are above average; in Years 10 and 11 they are well above average. Overall achievement in lessons is very good; it is good in Year 9 and very good in Year 11 and the sixth form. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Standards in the sixth form are well above average; results in mathematics and business education are particularly good. All groups of students in the school make very good progress.

Students' personal development is very good as a result of the very good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Relationships between each other and staff are excellent. Behaviour and attitudes are very good; exclusion rates are low. Students' enthusiasm for their work, very good attendance rates and mature attitudes promote very good learning and achievement.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. The school is very effective in identifying the individual needs of students. The overall quality of teaching is very good and helps promote high standards of achievement. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The use of more experienced specialist staff in the 'older' classes accounts for the difference. Teaching in English, mathematics, science, food technology, modern foreign languages and business education is of a very good standard. The school has successfully created an ethos for learning based upon high expectations and positive working relationships. The active encouragement of teachers helps motivate students and leads to high productivity. Students are keen and interested learners. Assessment procedures are effective in collating information but are not sufficiently rigorous for monitoring progress in some subjects in Years 7 to 9.

Overall the school provides students with a satisfactory curriculum; insufficient provision is made for the teaching of citizenship and ICT in some subjects such as art and design. The gaining of business and enterprise specialist status and the commitment to raising an awareness of 'enterprise' meets the needs of students in the twenty-first century extremely well. The positive and supportive ethos evident in all aspects of the school's life ensures that students emerge as mature and enriched young adults when they leave the school. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good.

The school has a very effective pastoral system. Students are very well supported and any underachievement is quickly identified. Very good care, support and guidance contribute significantly to students making significant gains in academic achievement and personal development. The school is very popular and is significantly oversubscribed; it enjoys a very good reputation in its community. The school has very good links with parents.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is effectively led and managed. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He is ably supported by a strong team of senior and middle managers, who show good leadership. The overall governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors are fully involved in the leadership and strategic planning of the school. They are supportive and bring a good range of experience to the governance of the school. The financial management of the school is very good.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school works very effectively with parents to support learning. Parents feel a very strong sense of partnership based on mutual trust; they have great confidence in the school. They are very

satisfied with almost all aspects of its work. Parents are provided with a good range of information about the activities of the school. Students enjoy being at the school. They feel that they are taught very well and they are very helpfully supported in their academic and personal development.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The things the school should do to improve are:

- Improve the teaching and content of the citizenship course.
- Ensure greater consistency in the use of assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9.
- Continue the development of the use of ICT across the curriculum.

And meet statutory requirements by:

- Making appropriate provision for citizenship, and ICT in art and design.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ST NICHOLAS CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

The size of the sixth form is broadly average; there are 207 students on roll. The school provides a full range of GCE 'A' level and AS courses

OVERALL EVALUATION

Overall provision in the sixth form is **very good**. It is very cost-effective and provides very good value for money. Students learn very effectively as a result of the very good teaching. The good curriculum provision provides good enrichment opportunities for students. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards achieved are well above average.
- Students' attitudes towards their learning are excellent and they have excellent relationships with their teachers. This is a major factor in enabling them to achieve very well.
- The quality of teaching is generally very good.
- Support and guidance for all students are very good and particularly for students with special educational needs.
- The provision in business studies and mathematics is excellent.
- There is scope for more extensive sharing of good practice across subjects.
- Effective use of assessment data is not fully developed at subject level to set targets and monitor individual progress against expectations.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English language is good . Standards are above average because of good teaching and very good attitudes. Strong leadership is driving up standards. Provision in French is very good . Standards are high. Students achieve very well as a result of good teaching and their excellent attitudes towards their learning. Leadership and management are very good.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is excellent . Students' achievement is excellent and standards are very high because the teaching is excellent and students' attitudes towards learning are very positive.
Science	Provision in chemistry is very good . Very good teaching underpins students' very good achievement. Standards are well above average. Relationships between students and teachers are very good. Leadership and management are very good. Provision in physics is very good . Standards are consistently above average. Very good teaching and learning coupled with very positive students' attitudes result in very good achievement. Leadership and management are very good.
Humanities	Provision in geography is very good . Standards are well above average. Committed students achieve very well. Very good teaching drives learning and supports independent study.

Provision in **history** is **very good**. Standards of work in A level and A/S level courses are well above average. Teaching and learning are of very high quality. Well-motivated students, who work hard, achieve very well.

Provision in **psychology** is **good**. Standards are well above average. Teaching is good and students' very positive attitudes and high levels of motivation enable them to achieve very well. Leadership and management are good.

Visual and performing arts and media

Provision in **theatre studies** is **very good**. Very good teaching enables students to achieve very well. Relationships in lessons are very good. Students' attainment is consistently well above average. The subject is very well led and managed.

Information communication technology

Provision in **ICT** is **good**. Good teaching, and excellent student attitudes, enables students to achieve well. Attainment at A level has been consistently above average. Students are achieving very well in the AVCE ICT course.

Business

Provision in **business studies** is **excellent**. Standards are well above average. Teaching is very good and enables students to achieve very well. Students' attitudes are excellent. Leadership and management are excellent.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students are very well supported. Guidance for university applications is particularly thorough. Students' academic progress and personal development is very well monitored.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership of the sixth form is good; management is very good. The head of sixth form has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form and action has been taken to spread good practice across subject areas but there is still scope for this to be developed further. There are rigorous systems in place to monitor the progress of students and ensure they achieve as well as they should. Induction procedures ensure students are placed on appropriate courses and enable students joining the sixth form from other schools to settle in quickly.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students thoroughly enjoy being in the sixth form. They appreciate the choice of subjects they are given and the help and guidance they are given by subject teachers and for university applications. They feel that they are treated as adults and that their views are listened to.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Overall standards at the end of Year 9, Year 11 and in sixth form are well above average. Examination and test results over time show continuing high performance and an improving trend. The overall **achievement of students is very good**. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good and is very good in Years 10 and 11. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. All groups continue to make very good progress. Standards in the core subjects are well above average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall the results of examinations and tests are well above average.
- Standards in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) are consistently well above average.
- Results at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average. (In comparison with similar schools, these are significantly high - the school is placed in the top 5 per cent nationally).
- Achievement in Year 9, as seen in lessons, is good; it is very good in Year 11 and in the sixth form. The value added is significantly high given students' attainment on entry.
- Overall standards have continued to improve since the last inspection.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.8 (35.6)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	40.7 (39.7)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	38.0 (38.7)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 199 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

1. In the 2003 National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9, the combined results were well above the national average. In the individual subjects (English, mathematics and science) standards were well above average. Overall standards in these subjects were significantly above those of similar schools (top 5 per cent nationally) The overall trend in test performances is similar to the national picture. At the end of Year 9, achievement in lessons in the core subjects reflects the very good test results. In general students achieve very well and make significant progress in their studies.

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	79 (76)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	96 (96)

Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	43.9 (43.6)	34.7 (34.7)
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There were 179 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Overall performance in GCSE 2003 examinations was well above the national average and the trend of improvement was also similar to the national picture. Performance in comparison to similar schools was well above average. Standards in English, mathematics and science in GCSE examinations were well above national averages. In most subjects, standards are above average. However, results in German were significantly lower than average.

Standards seen during the inspection

- In Years 7 to 9, standards are above average overall but are well above average in English, mathematics, science and ICT. Standards seen during lessons and in samples of students' work generally reflect above average standards of performance. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is good because the teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations, which encourage students to achieve well. However, achievement is only satisfactory in geography and citizenship. Achievement in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is very good.
- In Years 10 and 11, standards generally continue to be well above average. The positive effect of the business college status, including very well managed departments and very good teaching, can be clearly seen in the high standards achieved. Standards in art and design are average because there is not enough good teaching and learning. Overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good. The difference in levels of achievement between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 is due to the use of more experienced specialist staff with older students.
- Gifted and talented students are usually appropriately challenged by the work in most lessons and usually reach their potential. However, there are times in science and music lessons when able groups are not sufficiently challenged; for example, there is insufficient extension work. In general, the achievement of all students regardless of their ethnic background or innate ability is very good.
- The achievement of students with special educational needs is good in most subjects in Years 7 to 9. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11. All students in Years 10 and 11 with special educational needs are entered for GCSE examinations and there is also provision for the few Year 11 students who opt not to take the full range of subjects. There is no analysis of exam data to show how well students with special educational needs achieved in the 2003 GCSE examinations.

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	98.9 (98.9)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	52.2 (45.7)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	346.5 (327.7)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 89 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

- GCE 'A' - level results were well above the national average in 2003. The average points score for each candidate in advanced level examinations is high overall. A particular strength has been the consistency of this level performance in recent years. Girls perform better than boys

but there is no significant difference between the boys' performance and that of boys nationally. Standards achieved in A level examinations in 2003 were well above average in business studies, mathematics, English literature, French, design and technology, history, social studies and religious studies. They were above average in physics, information technology and geography, chemistry and biology and average in English language. A/S results in 2003 were well above average in business studies and history. In other subjects the numbers of candidates registering their results were too low to be compared to national figures. The overall standard of performance represents very good achievement in relation to their prior attainment. The trend in examination results is rising overall.

8. In lessons seen and in samples of work scrutinised, overall standards were well above average in Years 12 and 13. Achievement by the end of Year 13 is very good. Standards in mathematics are very high. Standards are well above average in all of the other subjects focused on in the inspection apart from English and ICT where they are above average. Students take their studies very seriously and their very mature attitudes towards their studies and towards homework combined with their ability to work independently are major factors in enabling them to achieve very well. Students arrive at lessons very well prepared and this allows them to make very good progress in their learning over time.
9. The key skills of students are well above average, and this promotes their progress in a significant number of courses. Students in Year 12 often have well-developed study skills and high motivation and these have a positive effect on achievement. Gifted and talented students achieve in accordance with their potential.
10. In most subjects students' written work is of a high standard, presenting their arguments in well-informed and organised essays and project work. Teachers have high expectations of achievement. This is effectively shown in geography lessons; these are well-planned and present challenging situations. The regular use of case studies illuminates learning bringing reality and strengthening understanding. The variety of teaching styles sustains interest. A Year 13 class, for example, debated the pros and cons of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. In post-16 business studies, teaching provides sensitive support to those students on the school's list of special educational needs.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students have very good rates of attendance. Students' attitudes and behaviour are **very good** and incidences of exclusions are low. Students' personal development is very effectively enhanced by the very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision in the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students enjoy school and rarely take time off.
- Students' work very hard in class and this helps them to make very good progress.
- Behaviour in lessons and around school is very good.
- Relationships between students and between teachers and students are excellent.
- Students mature into very responsible and thoughtful young people.

Commentary

11. Students are proud of their school and enjoy their education. Students work hard, and respond very well to enthusiastic teaching. Students are articulate and confident and they listen very well to the teacher. Students appreciate the chance to work in pairs or small groups and cooperate very well. Relationships between students are excellent. Students value the excellent supportive relationships that have developed between teachers and students. Students' answers, however hesitant, are valued and this gives students the confidence to both ask and

answer questions. A very small number of students who may be truculent are managed well by teachers. Students are very aware of the school's very high expectations regarding standards of behaviour and they respond extremely well. Exclusion rates are low. The school is very calm and orderly, students are extremely welcoming, well mannered and helpful and school is a very pleasant place to be.

12. Parents report that as soon as the school is aware of any bullying, including teasing and name calling, immediate and effective action is taken. The opportunity to meet speakers with disabilities in personal and social education lessons successfully promotes better understanding and breaks down stereotypes.
13. The overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is very good. Students have developed very good spiritual awareness through lessons such as English and the very well developed religious life of the school. The school provides a high quality daily act of worship which is interesting and relevant with very good pupil participation. During the inspection Year 11 students presented an interesting and amusing assembly which very successfully challenged stereotypes. The sixth form assembly observed was very moving and centred on the theme 'forgiveness'.
14. The moral and social development of students is very good. Students learn to value themselves and to be tolerant and respectful of others. Students accept responsibility for their own actions and have a strongly developed moral code based on fundamental Christian values of honesty equality and justice. This, together with very well developed social understanding, is reflected in the very high standard of behaviour and excellent relationships observed in the school.
15. The rushed nature of some personal and social education lessons inhibits their contribution to spiritual, moral, and social education. Students are capable of reaching the very highest levels of discussion and debate but these opportunities are missed. This can be compared with the excellent provision in the sixth form through regularly timetabled spiritual and moral education lessons, which are delivered by teachers with a very high level of expertise and commitment. During these lessons, students enhance their personal development to the very highest levels and learn skills that can be used well in other lessons.
16. Students have a good understanding of their own culture and the influences that have shaped them. Students' own experience of other cultures can be limited and this area is not always developed by the school. For example, in art and design and geography, multi-cultural education is addressed well, but in music lessons students mainly experience music from western cultures.

Sixth form

17. Students have excellent attitudes and behaviour, they work very hard and make the most of the opportunities available and this, together with very good attendance, helps them to achieve very high standards of academic success. They are well-organised, carefully complete homework tasks and work very well independently. Students are keen to take responsibility for their schoolwork. Through community service they respond well to a wider responsibility and provide valuable help in the school and in the local community. Relationships with each other and teachers are excellent. Students are capable of very mature reasoning they express well-considered views and listen very well to each other's opinions. They are very willing to learn from one another and recognise the value of this. Spiritual and moral education lessons give students excellent opportunities to extend their understanding of a wide variety of spiritual moral dilemmas and social issues. Students enjoy these lessons, which provide them with a different sort of challenge and deepens their understanding of the pressures of society. Those students taking philosophy and ethics have excellent opportunities to extend their spiritual and moral understanding. Students are able to develop attitudes and skills, which will enable them to take full advantages of the opportunities available to them in adult life.

Attendance

18. Nearly all students have very good attendance and this continuity of learning helps them to achieve very well. Parents are aware of the importance of good attendance and they ensure that their children attend school whenever possible. The school's procedures for monitoring attendance are satisfactory and are improving as the school starts to fully implement a computerised registration system.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.9	School data	0.1
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of Students

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	1109	29	0
White – Irish	32	0	0
White – any other White background	27	1	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	3	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	11	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	22	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **very good**. Generally, students achieve very well because of the very good teaching. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good but is better in Years 10 and 11. The achievement of students is different between key stages because of this difference in the quality of teaching. The commitment to learning, which is shown by students' very positive attitudes to work, is conducive to high standards. The extra-curricular and enrichment

opportunities provided are good. Support and guidance for students is very good. Assessment procedures are not consistent within departments.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of **teaching is very good** and promotes high standards of achievement. The level of learning is very good. Students have very positive attitudes to learning and are very keen and interested in their studies. Assessment procedures are satisfactory; there are some inconsistencies in the monitoring of students' progress.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very effective planning and subject knowledge help to promote and develop students' skills very well.
- The active encouragement of teachers helps motivate students and leads to high productivity.
- Teaching methods are very effectively geared to students' different levels of ability.
- The homework policy is effectively implemented in most departments; the practise promotes achievement.
- Assessment systems in some subjects do not provide students with sufficient guidance as to how to improve. Assessment procedures in music and citizenship are not sufficiently developed.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 182 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
13 (7.1%)	67 (36.8%)	71 (39.0%)	31 (17.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

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

19. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, with some examples of excellent teaching. The overall quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good. The difference in the standard of teaching between the key stages is primarily related to less experienced specialist staff or non-specialist staff being used for the younger classes. For example, the non-specialist ICT teachers are competent at the level they teach but in these lessons the pace of learning is slower. There also a greater proportion of personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons taught in Years 7 to 9 where the standard of teaching in these lessons is only satisfactory. Throughout the school, however, there was no unsatisfactory teaching seen in any subject.
20. A particular strength is the consistency of the quality teaching across most subjects. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed to the students and the school. They are keen to improve their teaching and support one another well. The school has a comprehensive programme for teachers' professional development and training. Members of the leadership team support other teams of teachers. The school has set clear aims for improvement in teaching and learning.
21. Teachers have secure subject knowledge, expertise and show enjoyment of their subject, which is often enthusiastically shared with their students. In the modern foreign language department, teachers have a very good command of the languages they teach and in the majority of lessons they use the language being learned effectively to conduct activities. Students therefore benefit from very good role models and their listening skills are very well developed. In the best lessons, teachers set suitably challenging tasks. Another strength of

the teaching is the teachers' use of discussion and activities, enabling students to express their own views and ideas. In history lessons, questioning is skilfully used, often aided with good quality materials, to extend students knowledge and understanding of issues and events. In a Year 11 English lesson on war poetry, the students thoroughly enjoyed exchanging sensitive, reflective ideas and analysing the historical context of the poems.

22. The very good teaching evident in a number of lessons enables and consolidates students' learning. Explanations are clear and questioning is effective in moving students' learning forward and helping them to recall previous learning. In music lessons questioning is used effectively to check out students' knowledge and understanding and to encourage them to think for themselves. Strategies for helping students to listen to music and understand the structure of a piece of music are very good. Starter activities promote stimulating beginning to the lessons. Learning is particularly good when teachers encourage students to use a style that suits them best, for example using a spider diagram to record key points about rusting of iron in a Year 7 science lesson. However, in some geography lessons the learning of students is too teacher-directed and textbook-led.
23. Students' learning benefits from the very effective homework policy, which is usually applied consistently and rigorously by teachers. The use of homework to develop learning is a particular strength in mathematics. Problems are set on all areas of mathematics previously learned. This means that homework forms continuous and regular revision, which effectively consolidates learning and develops in students a high capability for independent work. The work is regularly and thoroughly marked to provide quality feedback. This strategy is a key factor in the students' high achievement. Homework tasks in other subjects are well used to consolidate and extend learning from lessons. Students usually respond positively, taking pride in written work, which then forms an accurate record for later revision. However, teachers in science lessons do not always ensure that higher attaining students work to full capacity, for example by setting extension work, and opportunities are missed to emphasise the meanings of key scientific words.
24. An extensive range of visits and visitors to the school motivates students and promotes their learning. The evidence from a scrutiny of students' work over a period of time confirms the consistency of the very good teaching they receive.
25. Students are keen to achieve well. They make clear advances in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Their intellectual, physical and creative efforts are developing very well. In the best ICT lessons, learning objectives are clearly set and returned to at the end of the lesson. Students also assess each other's work well and so learn effectively from each other. Most lessons move at a good pace that maintains students' attention.
26. The overall quality of assessment procedures is satisfactory. The efficiency of the procedures enables managers to identify any underachievement by students accurately. This system involves a central collation of academic progress for students, together with previous national test and examination results together with an assessment of potential. These data are then analysed to predict future examination results and to set targets for all students. The process is effective, with appropriate action being taken for students who are falling behind.
27. Assessment procedures in subjects are satisfactory but there is some inconsistent practice in the work of departments. For example, mathematics and modern foreign languages make full use of the provided data and analyse it in many ways to monitor achievement. However, in music and ICT, the evaluation progress is more limited. Progress in citizenship is not assessed at all in Years 7 to 9; this situation is unsatisfactory. In ICT, for example, students in Years 7 to 9 are not regularly assessed against National Curriculum criteria. As a result they are unaware of their current standards and of the steps they should take to improve.
28. The marking of students' work is regular and diagnostic comments are helpful but there are some inconsistencies in this practice. For example, in science, whilst most teachers mark

thoroughly with helpful written comments, others make superficial comments that do not show students how to improve

29. Apart from a few specialist withdrawal sessions and supervised study time, students with special educational needs are taught in normal lessons. Teachers are well aware of the needs of these students. They have copies of students' individual education plans (IEPs) and sign a copy to show the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) that they have read them. Targets in IEPs are discrete and sharp thus helping teachers plan their work to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. In science, for example, teaching methods challenge all students and in art teachers know their students well and set work according to their needs – this is then supported by good assessment, which ensures students know what they have to do to improve. Where observed, teaching assistants provide effective support in lessons for students with special educational needs. In science lessons, for example, teaching assistants prompt students and ask probing questions to develop their scientific understanding and in design and technology lessons students are well supported.
30. A good range of assessment tests is used to identify students with special educational needs and to enable the tracking of these students over time. However, the analysis of this data and the effectiveness of re-testing as students move through the school is not sufficiently well developed.
31. Teaching and learning have continued to improve since the previous inspection. These improvements are largely due to the way the school has focused on students' learning and the monitoring of outcomes. Staff training has been directed towards encouraging students to think about how they learn and to be fully involved in their learning.

Sixth form

32. The overall quality of teaching is very good and promotes very good learning amongst students. Teaching is particularly effective and stimulating in mathematics and business education. In general, teachers have very good subject knowledge and use assessment very well to guide students about how to improve. Students are encouraged to work independently, participate fully in debate and use their knowledge of the subject to solve problems. In an excellent mathematics lesson on differential equations where the pace was quick, the teacher sensed students' uncertainties by receiving a large number of their questions and promptly slowed the teaching down to accommodate the learning of the slower members.
33. Teachers provide interesting activities to contextualise theoretical ideas to promote students learning. For example, in business education frequent use is made of real business situations and business links are routinely used to complement case studies and research. A good example of this is where an experienced managing director was thoroughly briefed and was then able to complement sixth form students' study of motivational theory in leading a discussion on the approaches to motivation during the establishment of a new company. Students have frequent opportunities to undertake in depth research and report their findings to others. Their investigations and discussions in English and history provide a very good basis for their other topics and underpin their learning very effectively. However some history lessons would gain from the use of more visual material such as film and video and out-of-school visits.
34. The overall quality of assessment procedures is good. For example, theatre studies students' work is very thoroughly and helpfully assessed with clear guidance for improvement. However, the use of data is not fully developed in some subjects to set targets and monitor individual progress against expectations.
35. Assessment by form tutors is regular and supportive. Much of it focuses on students' attitudes and application but there is also information about academic progress. Students report that they get very good support from individual subject teachers, however annual reports contain insufficient information about strategies for improvement.

The curriculum

The breadth of curricular opportunities is **satisfactory** overall. The school provides a good range of enrichment activities. The provision for accommodation and learning resources is good. The school is well staffed with teachers and support staff.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curricular provision in the sixth form has strong features especially through its range of courses and provision for students with special educational needs.
- The school does not meet the statutory requirements for the provision of citizenship.
- The provision and participation in extra-curricular activities, especially the arts, is good.
- The very good provision for gifted and talented students.
- The support for learning outside the school day is good and contributes well to students' achievement and personal development.
- There is insufficient use of numeracy and ICT in some subjects.

Commentary

36. Overall the curriculum provision is satisfactory; it is broad and meets statutory requirements in most subjects apart from citizenship in Years 10 and 11 and ICT in art and design. Curriculum provision emphasises academic studies. The school's recent attempts improve breadth and balance for students in Years 10 and 11 by introducing vocational courses, for example manufacturing, has proved unsuccessful because students show a stronger preference to academic subject choice.
37. The school's reaction to the recommendations for curriculum improvement at the time of the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Reductions in the choice of subjects for students in Years 10 and 11, modifications to the provision of science courses in Years 10 and 11, modern languages in Year 9 and ICT in Years 10 and 11, are to be introduced in September 2004. There is an imbalance in the time allocations between year groups in Years 7 to 9 for humanities subjects and physical education but this has not had an adverse impact upon standards.
38. A good range of extra-curricular provision throughout the year provides further opportunities for sporting activity. The department has embraced the development of the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy through links with local community sporting organisations that are of benefit to pupils. It is also involved in a national rowing initiative – project 'Oarsome'
39. The arrangements for setting students in to teaching groups of students with similar competencies from Year 7 play a large part in students doing very well in the core subjects by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. In English, single sex grouping helps in raising standards. In geography, design and technology and modern foreign languages, broad grouping means that there are teaching groups of students with differing and wide ranges of attainment and this has implications for the less than expected standards reached.
40. The school has successfully introduced the procedures and practices associated with national strategies in Years 7 to 9. There are noticeable effects in the introduction of the literacy, numeracy and science strategies where the achievement of students is rising. Suggested planning, assessment arrangements and teaching methods have influenced most subjects and these have made a good contribution to the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. The provision and use of literacy in the majority of subjects in the curriculum is good. However, subject departments are inconsistent in using students' marked competencies in numeracy and ICT to strengthen learning across the curriculum.

There is good extra-curricular provision that promotes good participation in sports and other activities, especially the arts.

41. Overall, provision for students with special educational needs is good. Students with special educational needs have full and equal access to the school curriculum and are fully involved in the life of the school. The strong ethos of inclusion and support for students with special educational needs has a positive impact on the social development and learning experience of these students as well as that of all other students in the school. Formal extra-curricular homework clubs run by teaching assistants means students with special educational needs have the opportunity to ask for and receive extra subject and specific support and guidance during the week. Provision for students with special educational needs across subjects is good overall and in English, science and modern foreign languages, it is very good. Departments are kept fully informed of special educational needs as a result of regular meetings of the special needs link group.
42. The provision for gifted and talented students is very good with much enrichment of their planned learning opportunities through, for instance, national and local competitions in mathematics and seminars in school where visitors provide varied and intellectually demanding contributions. The few minority ethnic students take full part in all aspects the curricular provision. The school recognising the differences in attainment of girls and boys has made provision for some gender group teaching and has met with success in raising standards still further. The school, following comment at the previous inspection, now has an agreed policy for sex education. Because of the denominational nature of the school the provision for religious education and collective worship were not inspected.
43. The provision for personal, social and health education is satisfactory. Provision includes satisfactory coverage of sex education, drug misuse and health education. The statutory requirement to teach citizenship, introduced since the previous inspection, has not been addressed. Some of the content of the curriculum has been assimilated into the teaching time for personal, social and health education. This has resulted in a comprehensive scheme of work for which inadequate curriculum time is allocated. There is a tendency for the coverage of the content to be superficial and for a need for greater clarity in the inter-connections between aspects of citizenship and personal, social and health education. This is an area for early review. Careers education is good overall. The students are served well by the external advice they receive when choosing options in Year 9 and in the sixth form when deciding on future education and entry to higher education. But career resources are limited in quantity and range.

Sixth form

44. Curriculum provision is good. The curriculum offered provides students with a wide range of courses. Recently more vocationally orientated courses have been very successfully introduced. Because a block timetable is not used in the sixth form, students, with very few exceptions, are given their individual subject choices.
45. Students entering the sixth form are competent in the use of numeracy, literacy and ICT. They have the necessary skills to cope with the courses they follow, partly because of the high standards they reach overall at GCSE level. There is good provision in the sixth form for life skills and communication skills to prepare students for selection interviews and living away from home. The extra-curricular provision is good. Students have the opportunity to study ECDL and a First Aid course. Students effectively participate in community service of different kinds within the context of their spiritual, moral education course.

46. The provision for students with special educational needs in Years 12 and 13 is very good. Students have full and equal access to the sixth form curriculum.

Staffing

47. The school is well staffed with experienced and recently qualified teachers. Teachers spend an above average time teaching, leaving less than usual time for management or organisational duties. Non-teaching staff make a very effective contribution to the quality of students' and teachers' experience through their work in management and organisation and in supporting and supervising students during the day. The induction of new teachers and newly qualified teachers is very good, as is the school's contribution to initial teacher training. Performance management and procedures for teachers' career development are well planned and monitored and closely linked to raising attainment.

Accommodation

48. The accommodation is good – much is refurbished or new, including a generous sixth form social area and specialist rooms for history, art and design and sixth form teaching. The business education suite and conference centre are excellent. Poor indoor accommodation restricts curricular and extra-curricular opportunities in physical education. A small number of art and design lessons are held in an unsuitable technology workshop but the drama studios, equipped with lighting and sound systems are very good indeed. A well-appointed chapel provides a focus for the school and a retreat for quiet reflection.

Resources

49. Overall, resources for learning are good. The procedures for allocating resources are clear and well monitored. Most departments have good quality textbooks and appropriate specialist equipment. The exceptions are in physical education where students do not have enough textbooks for the GCSE course. In art and design there is no kiln and insufficient ICT resources. However, within the school as a whole ICT resources are very good. The number of computers is above average and the school has well-developed plans to further improve ICT provision. The whole-school ICT network allows students good access to their work in several locations. The library, although small, has good resources. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. It is well managed to ensure that books and other resources are relevant and up-to-date. It is also used very well to enhance and support the learning of different groups of students through activities such as supported reading, a book quiz team and a reading group. Resources for learning in the sixth form are good. Most subjects have good quality textbooks with the exception of English where more A-level textbooks are needed. Appropriate specialist equipment is available in most subjects.

Care, guidance and support

The procedures to ensure student's care, welfare and safety are **very good** and very effective. . The school provides very good support, advice and guidance for students, both in the main school and in the sixth form. The school actively seeks, values and acts upon student's views in a very supportive manner. This practise is very good throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a very good induction programme.
- There is a very good awareness of health and safety issues.
- Students appreciate the generous support from staff.
- The school council is very effective.
- Support for progress to university is of a very high quality.

Commentary

50. Staff are vigilant in ensuring that students are well supervised. Routines are very well planned and the arrangements for boarding buses at the end of the day are very effective. Health and safety procedures, including arrangements for regular risk assessments are thorough. Arrangements for first aid and dealing with sick students are sensitive and sensible. Accidents are well recorded and reported to parents. The school provides a very clean and safe environment, which helps to promote effective learning. There are comprehensive arrangements in place for child protection.
51. Standards of care are very high. Students are well known to staff and students report that many members of staff go out of their way to support them both academically and personally. Students have good and trusting relationships with adults in the school who offer very good quality support and guidance. However, support and guidance through the curriculum is more limited as there are insufficient regular amounts of time dedicated to personal, social and health education. Tutor periods are used very well and provide a very effective start to the day. The time is used not only to monitor students' attitudes and behaviour but also to establish a calm atmosphere through prayer and reflection. Relationships between tutors and students are warm and caring and the Catholic ethos shines through.
52. Systemic and well-managed assessment systems result in student's progress being well tracked in Years 10 and 11. Support for students who are underachieving whilst studying for GCSE examinations is good. There are procedures in place in Years 7 to 9 but they are not as rigorous because they are less securely linked to external criteria. Support to raise the academic standards of weaker students is good but strategies to help higher attaining and average students who are drifting in Years 7 to 9 are less well developed.
53. Annual reviews are effective and support students with Statements of Special Educational Need as they move through the school. Parents' and students' views are taken into account because they are involved in the setting and reviewing of their targets. The school meets the curricular requirements as outlined in students' Statements of Special Educational need. The SENCO draws on a range of assessment data to help guide the appropriate placement of students on the school's list of students with special educational needs. Whole-school data provides the potential to closely track the progress students with special educational needs make.
54. The school has very high quality induction procedures. Students are involved in an interesting bridging project that has many facets before they join St Nicholas and this involves many opportunities for prospective students to visit. This work is rounded off during a residential experience for the whole of Year 7, which encourages social cohesion and is very much enjoyed and appreciated by students. As a result of these valuable arrangements, students are confident and familiar with a new ethos when they start secondary school and the year group soon bonds and develops its own identity.
55. Careers education is good. Satisfactory teaching of the 'Real Game' in Year 8 makes an effective contribution to careers education. Year 9 students receive good advice about their option choices. However, there is limited time in the curriculum for delivering careers education in Years 9, 10 and 11. Students have good access to excellent independent support and advice from the Connexions service. The careers library has been relocated to provide better access for students. Information about progression to university is good.
56. The school council provides a highly effective forum where students' views are aired and acted upon. Students express their views thoughtfully and they are confident that their ideas are taken seriously.

Sixth form

57. Great care is taken to ensure that students embark on courses that match their career aspirations and their abilities. As a result, drop-out rates are very low and students achieve very good academic success. Progress to university is looked at as early as Year 11 and the process is refined as students move through the sixth form. Students get expert and timely support and advice regarding applications to higher education. High aspirations are encouraged and very good support results in students accessing a variety of interesting courses at a very wide range of universities. Students are confident and not afraid to spread their wings. Students who wish to continue to higher education and those who are interested in going directly into employment are very well supported by the Connexions service who are able to give high quality impartial advice.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has **very good** links with parents. The quality of links with the local community is very good. The school's links with local schools and colleges are good. In the sixth form, links with the community are very good and they are good with other schools.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very supportive of the school and their children's education.
- Very good community links have been enhanced by the school's specialist status.
- Valuable links with feeder primary schools and a neighbouring special school bring mutual advantages.

Commentary

58. The school works very effectively with parents to support students' learning. Parents express a strong sense of partnership based on confidence in the school. Parents make a considerable effort to support their children's learning, which includes ensuring that homework is completed, that school's standards of discipline and high expectations are upheld and that transport to and from extra-curricular activities is available. The prospectus is of good quality, although the annual Governors' Report to Parents meets statutory requirements it is a rather dull document that does not accurately reflect the vibrant life of the school. Parents are well informed regarding their children's academic progress and personal development. Written reports are generally of good quality and usually contain useful strategies for improvement.
59. There are effective links between the special needs department and the parents of students with special educational needs. They 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. Parents and students are also involved in the setting and review of targets on students' IEPs. Parents are kept fully informed of procedures for support of students with special educational needs. The SENCO has close links with the main primary feeders and as a result is able to plan provision for incoming students in advance.
60. The school's specialist status as a business and enterprise college has enhanced community links. The school's productive links with the Catholic Church are well established and enhance spiritual, moral and social education and pastoral care. Links with local business are developing well and are very strong in the business studies department. These links have enhanced the quality of provision, as students are able to link theory to practice. Local community groups, such as the University of the Third Age and local smaller businesses are now able to access the high quality resources including information technology and conference facilities available in the school.
61. The school is outward looking and works well with other local schools. The school has very good links with its feeder primary schools, and works very well with a neighbouring special

school. There is an active local support system that includes other local secondary schools and the school contributes to raising standards locally. Links with colleges are less well developed.

Sixth form

62. Parents and students appreciate the high quality of provision in the sixth form, which is deservedly popular. Decisions to continue to the sixth form are based on well thought out decisions that value high academic standards rather than wishing to remain in a familiar and comfortable place. Students report that they really enjoy their time in the sixth form. They appreciate the very good academic and personal support they get from teachers. Students are aware that the support they get regarding university applications is of a very high standard. Student's approval of the sixth form and the school is reflected in their active involvement in school life and their willingness to make valuable contribution to not only the sixth form ethos but also the very positive ethos of the whole school. The quality of links with the community is very good. The outcomes promote effective business links to support the curriculum. The good links with other schools and colleges enhances the overall provision for students by providing additional learning opportunities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is effectively led and managed. The leadership of the headteacher is **very good**. A strong team of senior and middle managers supports him well; they provide good leadership in the school. There is **good** management of the school; efficient and effective monitoring systems have been put in place. The overall governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors are fully involved the strategic planning for the school. The financial management of the school is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership by the headteacher is very good; his vision provides purpose and direction for the school.
- Strategic planning is good; this is reflected in the development plans to promote an enterprise culture.
- Governors make a good contribution to the effective leadership of the school but some statutory requirements are not met particularly in relation to citizenship
- Senior and middle managers carry out their delegated roles well.
- The leadership and management of the business education provision are excellent
- The quality of leadership shown in pastoral care adds significantly to the school's ethos.
- Financial management is very efficient; it supports effective decision-making.
- The school's special educational needs policy does not contain all relevant details

Commentary

63. The headteacher provides very good leadership; there is a clear sense of direction for the school. He has instilled an ethos that builds upon the principles of respect for the individual and high expectations to sustain and improve standards. The school has placed an emphasis on improving the effectiveness of learning in lessons and supportive self-review. The school is managed with thoroughness and a clear purpose to consolidate strengths and promote innovation.
64. Developments in the school are based on very good financial planning. This reflected in the successful acquisition of business college status and the promotion of an 'enterprise' culture necessary in the rapidly evolving situation. The school development plan is effectively linked to budgetary allocations. The plan clearly identifies whole-school priorities such as improving the

provision for citizenship and a focus on the quality of teaching, all within the context of sustaining standards.

65. An effective senior leadership team ably supports the headteacher. The team works well together and shows a strong commitment to the objectives of the school. It exercises its delegated responsibilities well, conducting monitoring and review activities systematically and efficiently. The quality assurance procedures that operate within the school are effective. A systematic review of performance for each subject leads to targets being drawn up for both the whole school and individual subjects. Each target has clear criteria so that its success or otherwise can be measured and the level of planning for meeting these targets is particularly detailed. Consequently, the standards achieved by the school have continued to improve. The overall quality of middle management in the school is good with particular strengths being shown in business education and pastoral care.
66. The overall governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors are aware of the non-compliance curriculum issues. Planned curriculum changes will address subject time allocations and access to ICT. The governors made a realistic decision not to move on the compliance issue for citizenship until the co-ordinator had returned from illness. Planning and working lessons are well on the way to meeting national requirements. The governors show a strong commitment to the school and are knowledgeable about all aspects of the school's work. The 'background' information compiled for governors' meetings is extensive. Governors support the school well and have been particularly active in promoting improvements to the school's buildings and its environment and in acquiring business college status. The school has in place detailed policies on race relations, respect for the rights of the individual and equality of opportunity. It is very assiduous in the monitoring of its work in this area; these being central tenets of the Catholic ethos of the school. The governing body is an effective team and working relationships with the staff are very good. Annual meetings with parents are carefully minuted; these show the care governors take to explain the school's work to parents. Helpful information on the required areas is given in the annual report. The prospectus is an attractive and informative document, which reflects the school's values and work very well.
67. Effective leadership and management procedures have resulted in a good whole school ethos for the inclusion of and support of students with special educational needs. The SENCO has ensured the ethos of provision and support for students with special educational needs has a high profile and that staff are fully involved in the overall provision for these students. However, the analysis and evaluation of data to show how students with special educational needs are achieving is not yet fully effective. The school pays due regard to the Code of Practice for special educational needs and statutory requirements are met. However, the school's policy for special educational needs does not contain all the information it should.
68. The school's staff performance management process is well structured and is helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers and teaching assistants are supported by a programme of professional development, taking account of individual, department and whole-school priorities. The headteacher and governors have worked hard to recruit, train and deploy staff very effectively. There is a good system for introducing staff to new roles on appointment or promotion.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,677,445
Total expenditure	3,534,027
Expenditure per pupil	3,089

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	101,086
Balance carried forward to the next	244,504

Sixth form

69. The overall quality of leadership and management is good; the management element is very good. The governance of the sixth form is good. The Key Stage team has a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. The school has taken action to share good practice in assessment procedures between subjects but there is still scope to share excellent teaching strategies between departments. There is a good programme of guidance and induction into the sixth form to ensure students make a well-informed choice of courses of study when joining the sixth form. Students' progress is monitored closely and appropriate action is taken to meet the needs of individuals to ensure they are following appropriate courses and are making appropriate progress. Leadership and management of individual subject areas are good. Teachers know their students well and set appropriate targets. All students are well supported and arrangements to ensure students new to the school settle in quickly are very good. They are further helped to settle into the sixth form by residential courses attended by all students during their time in the sixth form.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students reach well above average standards at the ends of Years 9 and 11 because of strong, focused leadership
- Teaching and learning are very good and so students achieve very well.
- The curriculum is rich and varied and students are encouraged to think and reflect.
- Teachers and students are enthusiastic about their work.
- Students are not all aware of their standards or how to improve their work.
- Students do not have equal access to the ICT facilities.

Commentary

70. Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are well above average reflecting continuing improvement. High standards are not only sustained; there is also a gradual improvement. Achievement at the end of Year 9 is very good. Students have a very good knowledge and understanding of literacy skills by the time they have been in the school for three years. Their oral skills are very good in classroom discussion and in formal situations. Writing standards are well above average; most students have grasped key skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar and their work is very well presented. Writing is creative and poetic. It is critical and analytical, reflecting the department's encouragement of reflection. The standards of all students are benefiting from a wide choice in the variety of writing assignments and increasing differentiation in lesson planning. The use of ICT is inconsistent because access is limited.
71. By the end of Year 11, students write with understanding and critical appreciation. They can evaluate character and theme to a sophisticated level. A minority of students relies too heavily on the teacher and their work is lacking in detailed understanding and insight. Students with special educational needs and the gifted and talented achieve very well.
72. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. In the very good lessons, there is a brisk pace, students are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Students enjoy exchanging ideas with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. Very good relationships are expressed by enthusiasm and commitment to the subject. Students respond well to their teachers. In a Year 11 lesson on war poetry, the students thoroughly enjoyed exchanging sensitive, reflective ideas and analysing the historical context of the poems. Consequently, they presented their findings in a deeply felt and expressive manner, because the teacher sensitively drew out their ideas and encouraged their thinking. High expectations and challenge in a Year 8 lesson resulted in high quality work.
73. The leadership of the department is very good. The head of department has developed a cohesive team and has a clear educational vision that inspires both teachers and students. Teachers share the preparation of schemes of work and departmental responsibilities; as a result, they are regularly discussing what is best for the students. Accommodation is satisfactory and classrooms are well furnished and decorated with students' work. Teachers share too many rooms and some lessons take place outside the subject area. This causes difficulties in managing the department. Assessment is used to develop the curriculum. Marking is helpful and detailed. Targeting for students in Year 9, however, is unclear and does not yet match the school's assessment for learning policy. Some students, particularly lower attaining students, are not aware of their standards or targets and therefore are not sure how to improve.
74. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Teaching has been planned very effectively to target improvements in standards. This exemplifies the department's commitment to avoid complacency and further improve standards. Standards are rising, and, with the shared commitment to sharing good practice and attention to identified areas for improvement, the department has the capacity to succeed even further.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

75. Management in departments has been consistent in putting into practice the improvement of students' literacy skills. The lack of consistent monitoring lessens the impact because evaluations are incomplete and precise targets unclear. Nevertheless, the school provides a good provision for the improvement of literacy skills as reflected in improving standards. A range of texts, in all subjects, encourages the use of technical and specialist vocabulary, especially in modern foreign languages, mathematics and English. Key words are displayed prominently in most classrooms to familiarise students with specialist subject language. Students' very positive work attitudes encourage independent learning and further research. Students discuss their work enthusiastically and sensibly and show respect to their peers and staff by listening attentively. Reading fluency is encouraged as was seen to particular effect in

English and history. The vast majority of subjects undertake the teaching of basic literacy skills conscientiously as a means of improving standards.

Modern Foreign Languages

Provision in modern languages is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average at the end of Year 11.
- Teaching and learning are very good and enable students to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11.
- Students' attitudes are very positive and are a major factor in their achievement.
- Assessment is used well to meet the needs of all students.
- Higher writing skills could be better developed.
- Opportunities for students to use the languages informally and for real purposes are limited.

Commentary

76. Standards on entry to the school are average. Standards of work seen are well above average overall. Standards are above average in Years 7 to 9; achievement is good. Listening and reading skills are very well developed but writing and speaking are weaker. Students respond appropriately and promptly to questions and instructions in the languages being learned. They identify detail from short texts and extracts of speech. However, although most have a good understanding of grammar they lack confidence in speaking and are often too dependent upon written notes and prompts to respond spontaneously or manipulate the languages fluently. This dependence upon written notes also adversely affects their pronunciation in French and Spanish. These are some of the factors that contribute to the differences in achievement between key stages. Students write accurately to communicate their ideas and recount events simply but they do not give detail, compare or contrast their ideas effectively and the range of structures they use is limited.
77. GCSE results in French are above average, in Spanish standards are high. In German in 2003 they were well below average but numbers entered for the examination were low and over the last four years' results have been above average. The average points score for all languages is well above average. This represents very good achievement. In particular, the achievement of lower attaining students and students with special educational needs is very good since all candidates gained a grade and the majority achieved a grade D or above.
78. Students' attitudes towards their learning are very good. They concentrate in lessons, take homework seriously and come well prepared for lessons. This is a major factor in enabling them to achieve very well.
79. The overall quality of teaching is very good; it is at least consistently good across all languages. Teachers have a very good command of the languages they teach and in the majority of lessons they use the language being learned effectively to conduct activities. Students therefore benefit from very good role models and their listening skills are very well developed. Presentations are clear and students are challenged to identify and explain patterns, as a result they have a good understanding of grammar. The overall quality of learning is very good. Students make rapid progress when they are given the opportunity to practise informally and are directly involved in activities, such as surveys, pair work and games. In some lessons students move too rapidly from presentations to written work, as a result they are not always confident in speaking. Homework is used very well to consolidate and extend learning and allows students to make good progress.

80. The department is very well led; teaching and learning are monitored regularly and teachers work well as a team, although there is still scope for good practice to be shared. Good progress has been made since the last inspection; standards have improved significantly and the gap between boys' and girls' performance has narrowed. Accommodation has also improved. Assessment is used well to track students' progress and to set targets although assessment information could be used more effectively to enable students to evaluate and plan their own progress.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well and standards reached are well above average - they are high at the end of Year 11.
- Students' attitudes towards learning are very good.
- Teachers' very good use of homework, assessment and their high expectations of students.
- Insufficient use of ICT and practical mathematics to develop students' learning further.

Commentary

81. Achievement is very good overall. Students' attainment on entry is above average. In 2003, results overall in tests at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average. The more able students performed exceptionally well and achieved very highly. They performed better in mathematics than in science and English. Standards in work seen are well above the national average at the end of Year 9 and are improving marginally quicker than the national picture. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good.
82. At the end of Year 11 in the GCSE examination, there was a significant improvement in standards in 2003. Results were well above the national average and the most able students were far ahead of the national average for grades in the A*/ A category. Students, including those with special educational needs, do very well and make very good progress. The few minority ethnic students make the same progress and reach the same standards, as do other students. In recent years boys have performed consistently better than girls at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 but the margin is not significantly large. Overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
83. Students' very positive attitudes towards schoolwork contribute markedly towards the good strides they make in learning and their very good levels of achievement. They are enthusiastic and they enjoy the subject. They work hard and are keen to learn. They apply themselves very well. Relationships are excellent and behaviour verges on the exemplary. It is a result of these attitudes that there is an atmosphere in classrooms that is conducive to effective learning. Students' learning in Years 7 to 9 benefits from the very effective homework policy, which is applied consistently and rigorously by all teachers. The content of the homework always relates to previous work and not current work. Problems are set on all areas of mathematics previously learned. This means that homework forms continuous and regular revision, which effectively consolidates learning and develops in students a high capability for independent work. The work is regularly and thoroughly marked to provide quality feedback. This strategy is a key factor in the students' high achievement. Basic skills in numeracy are very strong and these are generally well used by teachers, however, insufficient use of ICT and of practical mathematics does not allow students to apply these skills to extend learning further.
84. The overall quality of teaching is very good- it is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. The difference in the quality of teaching between successive key stages is because less experienced staff are used with the younger

classes. In the very good lessons, teachers use the National Numeracy Strategy very effectively. Most teachers have very strong subject knowledge and understanding, they teach robustly and with pace. In Years 10 and 11, teachers use their expertise well to drive students hard by asking searching questions and explaining misunderstandings. Effective lesson planning is reflected in knowing which approach best meets the learning needs of individuals and groups of students. With very few exceptions teachers have high expectations. They make continuous demands of the students and challenge their thinking regularly to assess their progress and understanding. As a result the overall quality of learning is very good. The comprehensive assessment data is used very effectively, purposefully and constructively in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9, individual students are less certain of the progress they are making and of what they can do to improve.

85. Leadership and management are very good. A well-established team of mainly well qualified and experienced teachers work closely together with a common aim of helping students to enjoy mathematics and to raise standards. These aims are met very successfully. There is clear focus on providing opportunities for all students to achieve at the highest level of their potential. Department policies and processes are used consistently. Teaching provision and learning outcomes are systematically and regularly monitored and evaluated with appropriate action taken on the findings. The teachers are matched very well to the needs of the students. They are committed to sharing their experience and expertise through training new entrants to the profession. Resources and department finance are well managed. Progress since the previous inspection is very good. Standards are rising, students are achieving better and, in Years 10 and 11, the quality of teaching has improved.

Mathematics across the curriculum

86. Students' competence in mathematics is very good. The successful introduction of the requirements of the National Numeracy Strategy has meant that students have developed their confidence and capabilities in using and applying number and extending their oral and mental skills. Students use calculators correctly and with speed. They use measuring instruments with assurance and accuracy and read and understand equations and basic mathematical notation by the end of Year 9. The students' mathematical skills, however, are not being used consistently in all subjects they are taught and opportunities to extend learning, in particular higher learning skills such as problem solving, analysis and evaluation, are being missed. Use is more by accident than by systematic planning. A number of subjects including science, geography and English use and extend students skills in drawing and interpreting graphs, pie charts and Venn diagrams whilst in ICT, there is use of many aspects of numeracy in compiling, manipulating and reading data. Students' understanding of percentages, fractions and decimals and their equivalence is well used in design and technology but is not sufficiently used in other subjects of the curriculum. Some subjects, for example science and geography, have identified areas where numeracy could support learning and have included them in departmental schemes of work, but this is more the exception rather than the rule.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are consistently well above average.
- Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Lesson time is used to maximum effect because students behave and concentrate very well.
- Students are keen to do their best for their teacher because relationships are very good.
- Higher attaining students are not always well enough stretched.

Commentary

87. Results in Year 9 National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations were well above average in 2003, as they have been for several years. Almost all pupils in Year 11 gained a GCSE grade in 2003; their overall performance was significantly higher than in the previous year, but the proportion gaining A* grades was lower. Students do very well in comparison with schools with a similar intake. Those currently in Year 9 achieve very well. Their attainment on entry to the school was just above average, but standards seen in Year 9 during the inspection were well above average. Students continue to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11, leading to standards that are well above average in Year 11. Although boys tend to do better than girls at the end of Year 9, there is little difference in their performance by Year 11.
88. Students' very good achievement stems from their very good behaviour and concentration in lessons. They apply their scientific knowledge very effectively. In Year 7, the teachers' expert questioning drew out from students the idea that water and air might be factors in causing iron to rust, then went on to challenge them to consider how this could be tested.
89. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use pre-lesson routines very effectively to set an appropriate tone, ensuring that students are aware of their high expectations of good behaviour and work-rate. Students respond very well, demonstrating willingness to participate fully in lessons by wanting to do their best for their teacher. In many lessons, students learn from each other as well as from the teacher. In Year 11, lower attaining students achieved very well when they worked in pairs to help each other apply their learning about atomic structure. Lessons are well planned to ensure that students build on existing knowledge rather than repeat work from previous years. Learning is particularly good when teachers encourage students to use a style that suits them best, for example using a spider diagram to record key points about rusting of iron in Year 7. Homework tasks are used well to consolidate and extend learning from lessons. Students usually respond positively, taking pride in written work, which then forms an accurate record for later revision. Teachers do not always ensure that higher attaining students work to full capacity, for example by setting extension work, and opportunities are missed to emphasise the meanings of key words, such as reflection and refraction. The quality of marking is inconsistent. While most teachers mark thoroughly with helpful written comments, others make superficial comments that do not show students how to improve.
90. Leadership and management are very good. The department is well organised and teachers work very well together as team, committed to raising standards still further. They have recently given up 'precious' non-teaching time to ensure that students suffer minimum disruption following the unexpected resignation of a colleague. Very few students become disaffected because the curriculum is wide enough to provide something to match the needs and aspirations of all students. Areas for development are making more effective use of data to set short term targets for students and reducing inconsistencies across the department, for example in the quality of marking.
91. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Results and standards have remained well above average. Teaching has improved. Use of assessment has also improved; pupils in Years 9 and 11 know their target levels or grades, though not necessarily how to reach them. Laboratory accommodation has been significantly refurbished and extended, and now provides a stimulating environment for teaching and learning science. Students use ICT in science more effectively, but some aspects, such as use of databases, remain comparatively weak.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in Years 7, 8 and 9 because of the good teaching they receive.
- Students learn well because they have very good attitudes towards the subject.
- The use of ICT to enhance students' learning in other subjects is inconsistent.
- Assessments are not used effectively in Years 7, 8 and 9 to monitor student progress.

Commentary

92. Examination results in 2003 were above average and have been so for several years.
93. Standards of ICT skills on entry are average. By the end of Year 9 standards are well above average; students achieve well. Most students improve their ICT skills and understand how to use a wide range of software because of good teaching and access to very good resources. Higher attaining students use spreadsheets very well to model the costs for a garden centre. They successfully evaluate how they have used ICT to address a problem whereas lower attaining students are much less secure in, for example, assessing the suitability of their web site design. Most students have well above average literary skills, which enables them to explore abstract ideas. For example, they understand how to create hypotheses and successfully develop ways to test these using ICT. Most students use databases very well to manage information. This includes the use of complex functions that shows well above average understanding. Students in all years are very well motivated. These very good attitudes make a significant contribution to the good learning that takes place. There is no significant difference in the standards and achievement of girls and boys.
94. GCSE results in previous years show that students were not achieving as well as they should. This was due to changes in staff that prevented continuity of teaching, a lack of rigour in developing the GCSE coursework and insufficient monitoring of student progress. Standards of work seen in lessons are above average; achievement in Years 10 and 11 is now good due to improved teaching that expects more from the students. Teachers provide greater opportunities for students to improve their coursework outside lessons. As a result their marks have improved significantly. They now use databases well to design a system for a hotel. Those produced by higher attaining students are sophisticated and very well evaluated in terms of their suitability for purpose.
95. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. All teachers are enthusiastic which stimulates students to work hard. Tasks are challenging as teachers do not supply answers but encourage students to think the problem through. Lessons are very well planned, often in specific short, sections that maintain student interest. The best lessons set the learning objectives clearly and return to reinforce these at the end. Students also assess each other's work well and so learn effectively from each other. Most lessons move at a good pace that maintains student attention. Teachers and teaching assistants give good support to students; this enables those with special educational needs to achieve well. Students in Years 7 to 9 are not regularly assessed against National Curriculum criteria. As a result they are unaware of their current level of attainment and of the steps they should take to improve. The non-specialist ICT teachers are competent at the level at which they teach. However, in these lessons the pace of learning is slower.
96. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The department now works more effectively as a team and there is a desire to improve results still further. The management of GCSE coursework is now good. Teachers willingly take responsibility for specific tasks. Ample opportunities are provided for students to use ICT outside lesson time and they grasp these enthusiastically. The monitoring of teaching, learning and the progress made by students throughout the department is not fully effective. Patterns of underachievement, and the reasons for this, are not clearly identified and remedial action is not taken promptly enough.
97. There has been good improvement in ICT since the previous inspection. Computer resources are now above average. These are well maintained by a skilled and approachable technical

team. Students use ICT for their individual work in several areas of the school including the library where provision has improved.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

98. Standards of ICT in other subjects are above average. Although the provision for students to use ICT in other subjects has improved since the previous inspection, it is still inconsistent. The school has audited the way in which subjects use ICT and have an effective planning group to oversee its' development throughout the school. However there is, as yet, no overall strategy to match the requirements of each curriculum area to the resources available.
99. Most subjects include ICT in their planning. However, some subjects, such as art and design and history, have difficulty in accessing the ICT resources so provision is unsatisfactory. Although mathematics has a room with computers that is well used there is still insufficient regular access for all students. In subjects where resources are readily available ICT is used very well for example in food technology and in business education. The well-equipped drama studio enables students to use a wide range of technology effectively. Students use the improved music resources well for composing. The Internet is used for research in many subjects, as is word processing software especially for GCSE coursework in, for example, geography.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are above national averages.
- Less able students and those with special needs achieve well because their needs are well understood and effectively served.
- The department is ably led. The head of department is bringing about the changes to teaching styles that will raise achievement.
- The newly introduced Leisure and Tourism GCSE course is well taught and appropriately planned for the students it is targeted at.
- Homework is very well used to extend and reinforce learning.
- The department makes a planned and effective contribution to literacy, numeracy and citizenship.

Commentary

100. GCSE results are above national averages but students in the last two years have not done as well in geography as in the other subjects they have taken. They tend to do better in subjects that are setted. The department recognizes that it does not always fully succeed in the difficult task of accommodating the needs of both higher and foundation candidates in mixed ability sets. Results are skewed to the upper grades but there are not enough A*s. Boys tend to achieve better than girls when compared with the national picture reflecting the nature of the current course. Standards seen in lessons are above average. Less able students and those with special educational needs achieve well in all years. Action plans for such students are subject-specific and students are well supported, often with adapted resources or writing aids, both by teachers and assistants. Overall, achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory.
101. Students enter the school with broadly average geographical skills. By the end Year 9, standards are above average; achievement is, therefore, good. Most students know where

places are. They use terminology appropriately. They know, for example, why some farmers in developing countries make their living growing the raw materials for drugs. They have some sympathy for them. They understand why outside agencies need to intervene and what steps can be taken to redress the situation. Their understanding of other topics is sometimes superficial because there is a variation in time allocation for different year groups in Years 7 to 9. In some mixed ability classes there is little to stretch the most able.

102. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In some classes, learning is too teacher-directed and is governed by the use of textbooks. As a consequence, some students in Years 7 and 8 say geography lessons are boring. In contrast, others, especially those in GCSE classes, find the subject interesting and enjoy it. The student questionnaire issued to Year 9 by the department also supports this judgement. Students throughout participate readily in question and answer sessions. They work hard and remain on task especially when teaching challenges them. Their behaviour is invariably very good. A Year 11 class, for example, was wholly engaged throughout a lesson on the features of glacial erosion. The teacher's clever use of imagery - sanding wood to demonstrate abrasion - held their attention. Challenging tasks drove understanding, strengthened terminology and were well matched to the needs of all students so that there was very good achievement overall. The head of department is encouraging the spread of such progressive styles and better planning of lessons.
103. The department is responsible for the Leisure and Tourism GCSE newly introduced into Year 10. The course is well planned to match the needs of the target group and makes very good use of local visits. These stimulate learning and sustain student interest. Students participate willingly. Good teaching drives learning because teachers have high expectations, which are repaid with commitment. Standards are well above average and the achievement of students is very good.
104. The geography department is effectively led and managed. It is in new, suited, accommodation. The head of department has been appointed since the previous inspection. She faced the daunting challenge of sharing her vision and desire to drive up standards with long-serving male colleagues. All have major responsibilities elsewhere in the school as they did at the time of the previous report. Schemes of work have been rewritten and offer innovative and challenging experiences. They include a planned contribution to literacy, numeracy and citizenship. Examination courses have been changed. The performance of the department is now well reviewed. Systems for monitoring the progress of students are more secure than they were especially from Year 9. ICT is increasingly used as a research tool and for presenting course and other work. Opportunities for off site fieldwork would enhance the curriculum for Years 7 to 9. Geography is a lead department for the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. The management structures are therefore in place to enable standards and achievement to be raised. Overall, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well due to good teaching and their positive attitude to learning.
- Leadership and management are very good and staff work very well together as a team.
- A coherent ICT programme and better access to computers is needed in Years 7 to 11.

Commentary

105. Results in GCSE examinations are above average and consistently so. The subject is much more popular than it is nationally. Students perform well against prior learning but not as well as

in many of their other GCSE subjects. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls although boys achieve better against national norms.

106. By Year 9, students' standards are above average having been average on entry to the school. This indicated good achievement over Years 7 to 9. By Year 9, students have a good grounding in historical skills. Most have a good understanding of the main events and people of the periods studied. Knowledge of chronology is sound but the use of source material is underdeveloped. Higher attainers especially gifted and talented students are not always sufficiently stretched. Average attainers achieve well overall. Lower attainers work at appropriate levels and special educational needs students, when provided with specialist support, often achieve very well. By the end of Year 11, students' standards are above average. Achievement over Years 10 and 11 is good. This is the result of high quality teaching by subject specialists and students who work very conscientiously and very well throughout Years 10 and 11. By Year 11, students have further developed their skills in using historical evidence very well and are confident in undertaking enquiry and using source material. The best independent course work is of very high standard although a few less motivated students need more rigorous monitoring.
107. Teaching and learning are good overall and at times very good and excellent. Teachers are committed, caring and supportive of pupils. Well-structured lessons, teachers' very good knowledge of topics taught and strong classroom management and control built on very good relationships, account for the good teaching. Best teaching is lively, challenging, has good pace and high expectations. Questioning is skilfully used, often aided with good quality materials, to extend students' knowledge and understanding of issues and events. A strength of the teaching is the emphasis placed on developing investigatory skills but there is scope for more enquiry work in Years 7 to 9 and the use of more video and film. Learning would benefit if lesson aims were more precisely focused on what students will know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson.
108. The subject is very well led and managed. Very dedicated staff work very well together as a team. Curriculum planning and assessment are very good. There is need of a coherent programme of ICT and better access to computer facilities. Fieldwork undertaken in Years 10 and 11 provides most effective learning but there is insufficient in Years 7 to 9. Accommodation is very good and book resources satisfactory but video and film resources need developing. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and Technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership has focussed on clear priorities, particularly to unify practices in the whole department.
- Teaching is at least good resulting in steady good progress through the department.
- In Years 10 and 11 there are effective monitoring and target setting procedures, particularly in food technology.
- Students do not all show clearly how they develop their design ideas.
- ICT application and development is restricted by outdated equipment.
- Effective department and course monitoring is promoting improvements in teaching and learning.

Commentary

109. In 2003 the proportion of students achieving the higher GCSE grades in 2003 was well above average. Overall, students achieve broadly as well as they do in their other subjects. The standards achieved in food technology were very high. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above average.
110. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are above average overall. Students have varied but limited prior experiences, they make good progress when they join the department, and achievement is therefore good. The standard of making is a little better than that of designing because in some areas, students do not record the development of their design ideas, and standards of graphic skills are very variable. Students are, however, starting to use modelling techniques and the currently available computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) to develop ideas in other ways. In some areas, students spend too much time copying up notes where time could be spent more productively.
111. By Year 11, the standard of work seen is well above average overall. The achievement of students is very good. Coursework making is characterised by very diverse products in a range of materials that are well finished. Students use a range of prototyping techniques such as food trials and electronic circuit modelling well. In food technology the clear coursework focus results in students' work of a particularly high standard. Students use ICT very effectively. This level of application of ICT to course work is not 'the norm' in the whole department, however. In the best work, students clearly evaluate products against their initial specification, but few develop products from a specific client base. Students of all abilities make equally good progress.
112. The overall quality of teaching is very good; it is good in Years 7 to 9. Students are taught a wide range of skills, and assignments offer appropriate scope for their outcomes to be different. Marking and assessment is regular, but is not as closely focused upon National Curriculum levels as it might be. Teachers' expectations of design development vary, and more use might be made of structured student workbooks to address this. Students' understanding of how their own products might be improved is enhanced when good use is made of examples and product analysis techniques. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good, in one lesson seen it was excellent. Subject knowledge and expertise is very good and this results in well-informed students who use technical vocabulary and processes well. Good use of product analysis focuses thinking. Students know what to do to improve their work because assessment is regular, and target setting is meaningful. Where teaching is excellent, students are shown precisely how to review their own performance in mock exams to identify where and why they have lost marks, and how to improve.
113. Leadership and management are good. Clear priorities have been identified, and teachers share a commitment to continuing improvements and raising standards even further. There has been some success in developing a unified approach for the whole of design and technology, but more work needs to be done to agree common expectations and incorporate best practices. Assessment practices in Years 7 to 9 are being further developed, and project guidance booklets introduced in food technology for Years 10 and 11 results in very good achievement. In Years 7 to 9 the curriculum does not always allow for a progression of development in all areas, such as electronics and textiles.. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is limited by the lack of a textiles or vocational option. The available CAD/CAM facilities are starting to be incorporated to good effect. The further development of ICT application is restricted by outdated equipment, which does not support all applications. The very effective and regular monitoring of courses and teaching is having a good effect upon the curriculum, teaching and learning. Good links are being built with industry, and within the business enterprise culture of the school. Since the last inspection improvement has been good, food rooms have been refurbished and there is no longer a basic shortage of resources.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Drama was not a focus for the inspection but lessons were sampled. Examination results in 2003 show that standards were broadly average. In the two lessons seen, standards were average in Year 10 but were above average in Year 11. The quality of teaching in both lessons was very good. This has promoted improved standards and better learning opportunities, resulting in good achievement amongst the students.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement at the end of Year 9 is good.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The department is well led.
- Standards in Years 7 to 9 are improving.
- ICT resources for learning are unsatisfactory, preventing full delivery of the National Curriculum.

Commentary

114. Examination results were close to average and similar to the last inspection. The boys' results were well below average.
115. By the end of Year 9, the work is average and improving. Students draw from observation and apply tone carefully. They investigate famous artists, including Hundertwasser and Vermeer. They use air-hardening clay to produce sculpture based on household objects, recording their methods in sketchbooks well. This annotation is increasingly evaluative. They develop good decorative compositions from Egyptian and Aboriginal Art responding to the spirituality within the work. They do not use computers to create artwork. Recognising their well below average skills in Year 7, achievement by the end of Year 9 is good.
116. Standards by the end of Year 11 are average. The work is challenging and achievement is satisfactory. Although these older students have good pencil skills most have difficulty recording particular information through drawing. The majority is more reliant on their teachers for guidance and direction than usual. They increasingly use digital photography for research and there is some reliance on pictures from magazines. Compositions influenced by Futurist artists are well above average. Sculpture and computer usage are very limited. The most able achieve well, investigating, experimenting and recording everyday information in sketchbooks. Teachers' planning allows everyone to learn at an appropriate pace ensuring the least able make satisfactory progress.
117. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are good and sometimes excellent. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge, promoting enthusiasm in students. Careful questioning reviews previous learning and improves pupils' literacy. Students enjoy art and design. New topics such as Indian art are introduced with information on geographical location, art, fashion and architecture. Year 7 students made excellent progress when painting fox fur, using transparent watercolour washes to show the contrasting texture of stiff bristles and soft fur. Two classes made slow progress because gossip prevented sustained concentration. Assessment is good, examining attainment of different groups of students and strengthening curricular weaknesses.
118. The subject is well led. The head of department is ambitious for her subject and students. Subject documentation aims at raising attainment. Management is satisfactory. The monitoring of teaching and learning does not ensure consistency throughout the department. The shortage of computers and specialist software places constrictions on the full delivery of the

National Curriculum. There are insufficient resources for three-dimensional work. The accommodation is good although a small number of lessons are held in a technology workshop. Displays in the department and the public areas of the school are good.

119. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Standards have been maintained and teaching and learning remain good. There are still occasions when expectations of work rate are not high enough.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good which results in students achieving well.
- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are well above average.
- ICT is used effectively to enhance students' composing skills.
- Planning does not show clearly enough how students' musical understanding, skills and knowledge will progress from Years 7 to 9.
- Assessment procedures are not fully in place to ensure greater reliability in assessing students' work in Years 7 to 9.
- Arrangements are not in place for ensuring the quality of the instrumental and vocal tuition provided for students.
- The range of extra-curricular activities and performance opportunities are very good.
- Standards achieved by extra-curricular groups are high.

Commentary

120. GCSE results for 2003 were well above the national average. Since the previous inspection results have been consistent but the number of students taking the examination is low.
121. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are broadly average. This represents good achievement because students enter the school in Year 7 with attainment in music that is below average. Students in Year 9 create effective compositions using music sequencing software on computer. However, their knowledge and understanding of musical devices and key musical vocabulary are not secure enough. Higher attaining students achieve well and effectively refine and extend their ideas in their compositions.
122. Standards achieved by the end of Year 11 are well above average. Achievement is very good. This is as a result of very effective teaching and the use of music technology, which enhances students' composing work. Students have high standards of performing because the majority have instrumental lessons and take part in extra-curricular activities. In their compositions they show very good understanding of the genre and instruments or voices for which they have composed.
123. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Questioning is used effectively to check out students' knowledge and understanding and to encourage them to think for themselves. Strategies for helping students to listen to music and understand the structure of a piece of music are very good. Assessment is used well in lessons and students taking GCSE receive helpful written and oral feedback on their work to help them improve. However, teaching does not always ensure that students are learning key musical vocabulary effectively and using it with understanding. Planning for higher attaining students could be more sharply focused so that they make even more progress in lessons.
124. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department has made a good start to department self-evaluation and shows a clear commitment to improving the work of the department. However, planning does not show clearly enough the progression of students' musical skills, knowledge and understanding from Year 7 to Year 9 and arrangements for assessing their work are not fully in place. Students show very good attitudes and enjoy music as a result of the very good relationships that have been established. The range of extra-curricular activities and performance opportunities are very good and standards achieved by these groups are high. This is because of excellent directing and the commitment of both students and staff. The quality of singing by the 4-part choir is particularly impressive. The school also provides a good range of instrumental tuition but procedures for ensuring the quality of the provision are not yet in place.
125. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory overall. There has been a significant improvement in music technology resources, which are frequently used to develop students'

composing skills. The number of students receiving instrumental lessons has increased. However, provision for developing students' singing skills and their knowledge and understanding of the music of different cultures is limited within the planned music curriculum.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students achieve well in the compulsory course by the end of Years 9 and 11.
- The proportion of GCSE students attaining higher grade passes is improving and in 2003 was very high.
- Good quality teaching and learning across all years results in good achievement for all students.
- There is insufficient use of ICT to support students' learning in the compulsory course.
- The very good attitudes and behaviour of students results in a very positive atmosphere in lessons and extra-curricular activities.
- Poor quality indoor accommodation restricts the curricular opportunities available to students and their achievement in badminton and basketball.

Commentary

126. Standards on entry are below average. By the end of Year 9 standards are average. The majority of students achieve well in relation to their capabilities. In orienteering, boys have a secure grasp of the principles and procedures involved. In rugby, the more capable show good individual skills and techniques especially when running with the ball. The less capable, however, are not looking up sufficiently well; hence the accuracy of their passing is impaired. In gymnastics, the more capable girls have good body tension and the quality of their vaulting is above average. Many, however, lack sufficient body tension and the fluidity of their movement suffers as a result.
127. Standards in the Year 11 compulsory course are average and for some of the more capable students, they are above average. Most students achieve well and have continued to build on the skills and techniques learned in Years 7 to 9. In association football, most boys apply their individual skills well in small-sided conditioned games but in basketball they are not reaching their full potential because of the poor quality indoor accommodation. Though their individual skills and techniques are secure, their use of movement off the ball and positional play could be better. In hockey and netball, individual skills and techniques are secure for most but the use of tactical play and movement off the ball is not sufficiently well developed. In trampolining, the more capable use a good variety of jumps and movements in their sequence work and some are developing the capability, through support, use of the forward somersault. In badminton, girls are not reaching their full potential because of the poor quality indoor accommodation. Across all years, students have developed well their understanding of the principles and procedures for warm up.
128. The proportion of students attaining A* to C grade passes in GCSE physical education has continued to improve over the past three years. In 2003, the proportion was very high and students achieved very well compared to some of their other subjects. Current standards in Year 11 are above average; students are achieving well. Many have completed good quality personal training programmes for their coursework and, in their theory lessons, are developing well their knowledge and understanding of aspects of the social issues in sport.
129. The quality of teaching and learning is good across all years and results in good progress by all students. Teachers have a very good command of the activities being taught and have a very consistent approach as regards behaviour and discipline. Lessons are well structured,

purposeful and provide progression and challenge. In a Year 9 gymnastics lesson and a Year 10 association football lesson, for example, well planned and structured activities ensured students were all actively involved and improving their skills and techniques well. Learning objectives are made clear at the start of lessons thus students know what is expected of them. However, there is sometimes insufficient use of the whiteboard to highlight key terminology and key concepts. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They work very well together as pairs, groups and small-sided teams, respecting the capabilities of one another. Students respect the ethos within which the subject is taught; this enhances the quality of learning and promotes a very good atmosphere in lessons. Teachers circulate very well in lessons and their effective use of praise and constructive criticism makes students well aware of their capabilities and what they need to do further to improve. Although students are involved in pair work coaching and evaluation, there are sometimes missed opportunities for structured observation of good practice by peers – this would deepen their knowledge and understanding further and help them modify/develop their own practice. There is insufficient use of ICT to support students' learning in the compulsory course. Good quality marking guides students well in the planning and preparation of their coursework. Assessment procedures for the compulsory course refer to the four strands of the physical education National Curriculum but are not yet fully embedded.

130. Leadership and management are good. There is a sense of purpose and a focus on improving standards. Standards of attainment of boys in the GCSE course have, for example, improved as a result of this. Newly developed schemes of work help teachers plan their lessons well. There is an effective and purposeful working ethos within the department. There are insufficient textbooks for students who follow the GCSE course and insufficient storage space limits even further the quality of indoor accommodation. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.
131. Extra-curricular provision is good and extends students' learning. As a result of the commitment of teachers, 45 students have attained representative honours at district level and 46 at county level in a variety of sports. Four have attained national representative honours and one is a current national champion at athletics. Four different aged squads are currently basketball, cross-country and football district champions and the under-14 rugby union squad is county state school champions. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies was not a focus for the inspection in the main school but two lessons were sampled. Examination results in 2003 show that standards were well above average. In the two lessons seen, standards were well above average in both Year 10 and Year 11. Achievement was very good because of the very good quality of the teaching and the very good relationships in the classroom.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, Social and Health Education

132. At present the timetable is suspended periodically for a single period. During this time citizenship, personal social and health education or careers might be taught, however the arrangement does not work well. The time is insufficient to deliver a coherent curriculum and there is a lack of progression and continuity. These arrangements also have a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching. Each lesson has to be delivered as a discrete one-hour unit; this reduces opportunities for discussion and addressing spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. The teaching is often 'mechanical' and activities are limited. In order to compensate for these limitations there is extensive use of interesting and lively outside speakers, which are valued by students. Recent improvements to the curriculum have resulted in statutory requirements for sex and relationships education now being met but the present Year 11 were disappointed in their provision and reported that they had limited information about sex and adult relationships. Statutory requirements for drug education have been met. Provision for personal, social and health education in the sixth form is good. Although students find some of the material covered in Year 12 to be repetitive they appreciate the life skills programme in Year 13, which prepares them well for the practicalities of living away from home. Provision in the sixth form is further enhanced by a high quality programme of spiritual and moral education which provides the opportunities for discussion and higher levels personal development that are not provided for in the main school.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Insufficient time is allocated to the teaching of the subject in Years 7 to 11.
- Clear progress has been made in implementing a citizenship programme.
- The current provision does not meet National Curriculum requirements.
- The school provides very good opportunities for students to develop their skills of participation and responsible action.
- It is not clear in which other subjects citizenship topics are being taught explicitly.
- Arrangements for assessing, recording and tracking students' progress and reporting to parents are not yet in place.

Commentary

133. Citizenship is taught as part of the programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education by form tutors. Achievement in citizenship is satisfactory. However, other subjects contribute to the course but it is not clear in the planning where citizenship is taught explicitly in other subjects. The time allocated for citizenship overall is inadequate.

134. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers engage students effectively and involve them in discussion work but there are limited opportunities for students to analyse information and justify orally and in writing personal opinions about issues. Visiting speakers also contribute to students' learning. For instance in a Year 11 lesson, students made clear gains in their knowledge and understanding of local government.

135. The leadership and management of citizenship are unsatisfactory. Clear progress has been made in implementing a citizenship programme but development has been slow because of staff absence due to illness last year. The subject co-ordinator has met regularly with other staff involved to discuss issues and review progress and has a clear understanding of the

areas for development. However, a development plan has not yet been devised and issues relating to the management and monitoring of the provision have not yet been addressed. Overall planning lacks coherence and progression because the three strands (knowledge and understanding; developing skills of enquiry and communication; developing skills of participation and responsible action) are not explicitly developed and interlinked, as required.

136. The school provides a very good range of opportunities for students to develop their skills of participation and responsible action through school-based activities such as the year councils, residential experiences, fund raising activities and the Youth Parliament scheme but they have not yet been incorporated into the planning of the programme. Arrangements for assessing, recording and tracking of students' progress and reporting to parents in Years 7 to 9 are not yet in place.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

GCE AS level courses 2003

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	1	100	61.9	0.0	17.1	20	22.1
Biology	3	100	65.2	33.3	11.1	40	20.6
Chemistry	3	100	72.7	33.3	13.9	33.3	24.1
Other Social studies	4	100	69.7	25	16.7	42.5	24.1
Information & Communication Technology	4	75	67.0	0.0	10.9	27.5	21.4
Sports/Physical Education Studies	1	100	73.2	0.0	11.4	20	23.1
Religious Studies	4	100	80.2	75	22.6	47.5	29.8
Geography	4	100	74.3	25	19.8	42.5	26.5
History	5	100	80.7	60	19.5	46	28.6
English/ English language	3	66.7	82.9	0.0	17.5	20	28.7
English literature	1	100	85.9	0.0	19.1	40	30.2
General Studies	12	100	73.9	25	17.8	34.2	25.7
Business Studies	5	100	76.4	40	16.3	42	26.2

GCE A level and AVCE courses 2003

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	43	100	96.7	86	55.6	105.6	88.8
Biology	21	100	96.4	33.3	39.2	79	78.6
Chemistry	16	100	97.6	50	49	88.8	84.9
Physics	17	100	96.7	35.3	44.6	83.5	81.7
Information Communication Technology	5	100	95.6	0.0	24.6	72	69.5
Religious Studies	6	100	98.8	83.3	46.7	106.7	85.6
Other social studies	10	100	97.4	70	42.7	98	81.8
Art and Design	2	100	98.6	0.0	50.2	60	87.5
Drama	5	100	99.5	40	40.1	88	83.6
Design and Technology	5	100	97.8	80	35	92	77.9
Geography	14	100	98.7	57.1	44.5	90	84
History	6	100	99	66.7	44.6	96.7	84.6
French	10	100	98.8	100	51.5	108	87.6
German	4	100	98.4	25	47.9	80	84.8
Spanish	2	100	98.3	100	50.2	120	86.9
English/ English language	24	100	99.4	29.2	36.3	79.2	80.9
General Studies	59	96.6	94.7	37.3	31	78	73.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English Literature was not a focus subject but was sampled. The teaching and learning were very good. Dramatic skills were used to deepen understanding to great effect. A variety of pace and activity stimulated and sustained interest and involvement. The teacher's clear enthusiasm for the subject inspired the students. High expectations and challenge focused on achievement. Students developed empathy, responsibility and knowledge.

English language

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good leading to good achievement.
- The high expectations of teachers develop confidence and challenge.
- The leadership of the subject provides a clear vision for staff and students.
- A small minority of students is not as committed as the vast majority.
- Some students are not sure of how to improve their work.

Commentary

137. Achievement is good. Results in the 2003 GCE A-level English language examinations were above average. Students make valid observations and most use sophisticated technical vocabulary in their writing. Critical, analytical writing is a strong feature of the students' work and their independent research skills are well developed. A minority of students does not make sophisticated inferences from texts or sustain detailed textual analysis. The standards of work seen in lessons are above average.
138. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Very good relationships create a positive working atmosphere. This reflects students' positive comments about teaching and learning. In lessons there is a brisk pace, students are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Students enjoy their work with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. In a good Year 12 lesson, students analysed language carefully and accurately. They were actively involved and developed critical skills because of their teacher's careful planning and high expectations. The teachers make good use of assessment data for curriculum planning and setting targets for improvement. The study of historical and multi-cultural texts deepens students' understanding of language and power. Occasionally, lengthy teacher exposition reduces the active involvement of students. Sensitive planning of lessons ensures that students are given the opportunity to air their views in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Students miss some opportunities to develop independence because they are not sufficiently involved. Small minorities of students who are not as committed to the course are not as motivated as their peers. Marking is thorough, diagnostic and detailed. Target grades are too vague to provide clear improvement guides.
139. The leadership of the department provides a clear vision for staff and students. Good management results in shared preparation of schemes of work. This produces well-planned lessons, work matched to students' needs and the development of staff. As a consequence progress since the last inspection is good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

140. Well above average communication skills are achieved because of very good planning and teaching. Challenging work and excellent subject knowledge inspires and promotes sophisticated language use. Students write analytically and critically in English and drama. In mathematics, physics and chemistry students read and research extensively. Their writing is

consequently well informed and analytical. Communication skills are taken seriously as a means of raising standards and preparing students for later life.

Modern Foreign Languages

The focus of the inspection was French. Spanish was also sampled. Standards in Spanish are average in Year 12. Students achieve well because of good teaching and their commitment to their studies.

French

Provision in French is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in French are well above average
- Standards in 'A' level examinations are high
- Students' attitudes are excellent
- Teaching and learning are very good and enable students to achieve very well
- Extra-curricular opportunities are very good
- Lesson planning is not always focused sharply enough on language structures
- Opportunities for students to present their views independently are not fully developed

Commentary

141. A/S level and A level results were very high in 2003 examinations, the majority of students achieved A grades.
142. Standards in French in Year 12 are average and in Year 13 they are well above average. This represents good achievement in relation to prior attainment. Students' reading and listening skills are well developed; they identify detail from a variety of texts including the press and information from the Internet. However, students in Year 12 are not confident in speaking at length or spontaneously. In Year 12 writing skills are average; students have a good understanding of grammar and apply this knowledge accurately in writing. Over time, as a result of good teaching and their very positive attitudes towards their learning students make very good progress. They take homework assignments very seriously and arrive very well prepared for lessons.
143. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have a very good command of French and use the language exclusively and very effectively in lessons. Activities are appropriate and resources up-to date. Very good use is made of information communication technology, enabling students to access up to date information and work at their own pace and level during lessons. Students have frequent access to native speakers outside lessons and a very good range of extra-curricular activities, such as visits to the Alliance Française and language days at universities effectively support and extend their learning. In some lessons there is insufficient focus on linguistic structures so that opportunities are missed to support students and to increase their confidence in expressing their ideas in speech.
144. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Students appreciate the very good relationships they have with their teachers and the help and guidance they are given as well as extra curricular opportunities the department provides. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve exceptionally well and reach very high standards.
- Results are well above average and are improving at the highest grades.
- The quality of teaching is excellent.
- Students' attitudes towards learning are very positive.

Commentary

145. Students achieve very highly and reach standards that are far above average. There has been a very good degree of consistency in the high levels of achievement and standards since the previous inspection. Students make excellent progress in this very popular subject because their very positive attitudes to learning are supported by high quality teaching. There are similar and relatively large numbers of female and male students taking the subject. Results at 'A' level' rose sharply at the highest grades (A/B) in 2003, with female students making the greatest strides. Overall, male students are performing better in mathematics than in most other post-16 subjects. In recent years, a notable feature has been the 100 per cent pass rate at 'A' level. Nearly all students in Year 12 groups continue their study of the subject to 'A' level. A small number of the most competent students extend their studies and are assessed in further mathematics where they perform exceptionally well and reach very high standards. The very few students with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic groups perform as well as all other students. Students with high levels of competence do exceptionally well because their learning needs are specifically addressed through ample extension and enrichment activities.
146. Teaching and learning are excellent. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. A team of four very well qualified and well-established teachers has a thorough command of the content of the subject. The teachers' expectations and the students' commitment are potent influences in the very rapid learning that takes place in most lessons. Students are highly motivated and work hard. They participate fully in lessons in which relationships are friendly and harmonious. Teachers are conscientious in their preparation and in their attention to detail, especially in their assessment of students' work and, in particular, the high detail in the marking which helps students' see how they can improve and gauge their progress. Lessons are brisk and challenging. Students seldom allow the teacher to move further unless they have fully understood the content. Interactions between teacher and students are very productive and involve the reciprocal use of searching questions and illuminating answers. In an excellent lesson on differential equations where the pace was quick, the teacher sensed students' uncertainties by receiving a large number of their questions and promptly slowed the teaching down to accommodate the learning of the slower members. The use of homework is a strong feature. It is set regularly and is marked promptly. It contributes effectively to helping students learn independently and for teachers to respond to individual needs.
147. The leadership and management of the mathematics department are very good. The teachers are ambitious for the success of the students and are committed to raising standards, which they are accomplishing with a very good measure of success. Teaching, learning and achievement are monitored closely and the outcomes are used to raise standards. There is a vision for the future direction the work of the department might take and this is shown in a well-conceived subject improvement plan. Schemes of work are thorough, detailed and helpful documents. Department policies emerge as very good and consistent practice. All aspects of the work of the department are monitored and evaluated and the outcomes are effectively used to improve students' learning. Teachers have been very well deployed and their qualifications, experience and expertise have been matched carefully to the needs of the students. Students

and parents are highly satisfied with the provision, management and leadership of the department. Improvement since the last inspection has been good because the quality of teaching has improved and standards have risen. The use of ICT has improved but there remains more to do if achievement is to be raised still further.

SCIENCE

The main focus was on chemistry and physics but one lesson of AS biology was also sampled. Teaching was very good. Students investigated the effect of factors, such as the presence of soluble aspirin, on the heartbeat of daphnia and improved their enquiry science skills very well.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in A-level examinations are consistently above average.
- Very good attitudes and personal development underpin students' very good achievement.
- Teaching and learning are very good throughout.
- Staffing of the department is very good.
- ICT could be used more frequently to enhance teaching.

Commentary

148. Results in 2003 examinations, with a smaller intake than usual, were well above the national average. In relation to their GCSE results this data indicates that these students achieved very well. Retention rates are very high with most students continuing their study of chemistry in Year 13.
149. Current standards of work are well above average in both Years 12 and 13 and reflect previous examination results. Most students are achieving very well and are producing work consistent with the highest grades. Experimental work is very good and makes a significant contribution to standards. Students grasp and learn concepts in chemistry well. For example, they are able to use their prior knowledge of equations to build up complex equations for oxidation reduction systems. As the result of predominantly very good teaching they make very good progress in their lessons and their achievement over time is very good. Numerical skills are well developed and as a result students are very adept at using mathematics to solve chemical problems.
150. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are very well qualified and have an excellent understanding of chemistry. As a result their explanations of chemical phenomena are clear and precise and enable students to learn better. Homework, which accompanies chemistry modules, focuses on the most relevant aspects of the course. Work thus produced is rigorously monitored and evaluated by teachers so that the progress of students improves. Lessons are well planned with a good focus on what students are to learn. Expectations of students are very high and work accordingly is sufficiently challenging. Although students have some exposure to ICT in their studies it is not used sufficiently to extend and consolidate work or to improve the presentation of lessons. Students' learning is very good. They respond very well to challenge, work hard and show considerable interest in their work. Small group sizes in some classes enable teachers to gain an appreciation of students' strengths in the subject and improve their weaknesses.
151. Students have very positive attitudes towards chemistry. Coupled with very good teaching this produces a very good learning environment in which very good learning and academic results can be achieved.

152. The subject is very well managed and there is a clear sense of direction. Leadership of the subject is very knowledgeable and leads to effective strategies for improving standards. There is very good co-operation between teachers in the department and this improves the learning environment. Since the previous inspection improvement has been good. The department has succeeded in maintaining high standards in all aspects of its work.

Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
- Teaching is rigorous and leads to very good learning.
- Students' attitudes are very positive.
- Accurate marking of students' work contributes well to their achievement.

Commentary

153. In 2003 examinations A-level results were above average. Every student achieved at least a pass grade. In relation to their GCSE results, these results confirm that students' achievement was very good. Retention rates are high with most students continuing their study of physics in Year 13.

154. Current standards are well above average in both Years 12 and 13 and reflect previous examination results. Both Year 12 and Year 13 students are achieving much better than might be expected in relation to their GCSE results. Students in Year 12 build effectively on their GCSE experience and cope very well with the AS-level course. All students make very good progress in their studies as the result of very good teaching. For example, in a very good Year 12 physics lesson students made very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of current electricity by focusing on the experimental and investigative aspects of the topic. There is a particular emphasis on the development of mathematical skills by the department and this contributes significantly to students' achievement. Year 13 students continue to make very good progress in spite of dealing with more complex areas of physics. A key part to their success is the very well structured homework they complete on each module of work covered. The very good marking of these projects gives students a very good idea of their strengths in the subject and how to improve their weaknesses.

155. Teaching is very good and this is confirmed by scrutiny of students' work. Lessons are very well planned although sometimes too didactic in approach. Teachers make effective use of very strong subject expertise to ensure that concepts are clearly explained and learning as a consequence is better. There is a very good emphasis on the teaching of enquiry science skills through individual experimentation. This results in better progress because this 'hands on' approach consolidates their theoretical knowledge and understanding very well.

156. Expectations of students are high and the learning environment is purposeful. Students' learning is very good across both age ranges. They respond well to challenge, work hard and show considerable interest in their work. Their attitudes to the subject are very positive and they show a mature outlook, evidenced by the quantity and quality of work they produce. Students' views of the subject are very positive and supportive. They feel that they are making very good progress and this increases their motivation to succeed.

157. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a commitment to build on what has already been achieved. Since the previous inspection improvement has been good. The department has consistently maintained above average standards in the subject.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall, students are achieving well because of the good teaching they receive.
- Students have excellent attitudes towards their work, which enhances their learning.
- Attainment in 'A' level ICT has been consistently above average.

Commentary

158. GCE A and AS level results in ICT were above average in 2003 and have been so for several years.
159. By the end of Year 13, students following the A-level ICT course are achieving well because of good teaching and their excellent attitudes towards the subject. Students speak highly of the progress they have made and of the very good access they have to ICT resources. Their written work shows good improvement as they move through the course. For example, higher attaining students write in detail, and with understanding, about the Computer Misuse Act. Teachers provide a good structure for students to organise their notes. As a result most students' work is well organised and useful for revision. Year 12 students have a well above average understanding of how databases can be used to support a business. No examinations have yet been taken in AVCE ICT but Year 13 students are achieving very well. Their websites are of a very high standard in terms of design and suitability. Their evaluation of their PowerPoint presentations is also well above average in terms of detail and awareness of the needs of the particular audience. All students in Year 13 benefit from the small groups in which they are taught, as teachers are able to give individualised support very effectively. Overall, the standards of work seen are above average.
160. Teaching and learning are good. Students are tested regularly and most students act upon the good advice from their teachers on how they should improve their work. Marking of students' work is very thorough. Teachers' questions are challenging and based upon a very good knowledge of the subject. Therefore, students are made to think and respond. Relationships are very good. Teachers treat students like adults. There is a good working atmosphere in lessons with appropriate light touches of humour. Teachers instigate good discussion by stimulating presentations and research tasks especially in the AVCE ICT course. Very good use is made in the AVCE ICT course, of links with business. This gives students realistic examples of how ICT is used in the work place. Most students complete their ICT courses and many intend to continue with these in higher education.
161. Leadership and management are good. Teachers work well together and learn from each other. Courses are well planned and resourced. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

162. Provision for students to use and extend their ICT skills in other subjects is good. Access to computers is readily available to sixth formers and they make good, independent use of these facilities. The optional European Computer Driving Licence course is effective in providing opportunities for students to further develop their ICT skills and qualifications.
163. Excellent use of ICT is made in business studies where students use a wide variety of applications and the excellent resources very effectively. Students in modern foreign languages use specific interactive programs very well to support their learning. Good use of ICT is made in English and drama for coursework presentation. Extensive use is made in geography for

research, coursework and analysing data using spreadsheets. Most students use ICT well to present their work and most are adept at using web sites for research.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High standards are being maintained.
- Students achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good. Independent learning is very well supported.
- Students enjoy geography; relationships are relaxed and productive.
- Students know how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Residential fieldwork is well integrated into the course.

Commentary

164. Recent 'A'-level and AS level examination results are well above the national average. In 2003 students typically did better in geography than in their other subjects. Compared to their GCSE results two years earlier, achievement is very good. Standards in lessons remain well above average. More male than female students take geography. Both achieve very well. Students in Year 12 understand how physical factors account for variations in population density, for example, whilst Year 13 students have the skills to interpret population pyramids. They can discuss the problems that ageing populations bring. Understanding throughout is well supported by the confident way in which students use terminology.
165. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers concentrate on the areas of the subject which particularly interest them. Consequently they convey their enthusiasm to students. Lessons are well planned and built upon high expectations. The regular use of case studies illuminates learning bringing reality and strengthening understanding. The variety of teaching styles sustains interest. A Year 13 class, for example, debated the pros and cons of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. Students had researched their standpoint very thoroughly. Their arguments were convincing. What drove learning for all was collaborative working, the lively nature of the debate, which ensured that knowledge and understanding were shared, and the teacher's skilful input that aided lateral thinking. Independent learning and research opportunities figure prominently. Students are very well prepared so that they rise to the challenge that such work sets them. Tasks are sufficiently open-ended to stretch the most able.
166. Sixth form students are mature and well motivated. They repay high expectations of them with commitment. They enjoy geography, especially the human aspects. They quickly make the transition from GCSE because they are taught how to analyse information. There is a strong emphasis on examination technique. Students are steered towards precision in answering questions and to depth and accuracy when describing. Their progress is regularly assessed. They know how well they are doing, how well they should be doing and how to improve. Students are involved in setting their own targets and monitoring progress. A recent progress review led to the insertion of a lesson designed to boost understanding of weathering by applying knowledge to the framework of an examination question. As a result, students willingly accept responsibility for their own learning. In lessons they remain on task, contributing freely to question and answer sessions. They relate very well to each other and to their teachers. In Year 13 especially, the productive way in which teachers and students interact benefits from shared experiences of residential fieldwork. Such fieldwork is well integrated into the teaching

programme. A Year 12 class, for example, tackling the abstract ideas of Christaller would test his theory on the ground in Northumberland.

167. Leadership and management are good. Teachers work effectively as a team and share a common desire to drive up standards. Together they have built on the strong situation previously reported. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

History

The quality of provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching on the AS and 'A'- level courses helps students to achieve very well. Very good leadership and management ensure a very coherent course in Years 12 and 13.
- Students' very good attitudes and commitment results in very good progress in learning.
- Lessons need more variety especially the use of film and video and out of school visits.

Commentary

168. Recent 'A'-level and AS level examination results are well above the national average. In 2003 most students achieved to expected levels or above. The retention rates on the 'A'-level course are very high but on the AS level course in 2003 a number of poorly motivated students left the course.
169. Standards of work seen on the AS and A level courses are well above average. This is due to very good teaching and students who are mostly very well motivated, capable and work hard. There is very good achievement over Years 12 and 13. Students in Year 12 show good knowledge and understanding of introductory topics covered in both British and European history. Work on both courses is covered thoroughly and in great detail. However, course units would benefit from a summary review at the end of each unit so that students do not lose sight of the overview focus of the topic. Critical analyses are progressively and well developed over time although evaluations are often rather limited by narrow application in Year 12. The higher attainers in Year 13 evaluate very effectively a range of evidence to produce very well balanced and convincing arguments. When writing set assignments few students undertake independent research using a range of textbooks or magazine articles to add to text and notes provided in class.
170. Teaching is very good on the AS and 'A'- level course. Lessons are very well and thoughtfully planned and presented in a structured and focused way so that students clearly understand what they are doing. This results in very good learning. Lessons develop students self-learning impressively through discussion, group work and independent learning. Relationships are excellent, relaxed but professional and lead to high student commitment. Expectations are high and teaching challenging always explaining the need to subject ideas and evidence to scrutiny. Learning gains much from very skilful use of the questioning technique as it extend students knowledge and understanding of topics taught. Lessons would gain from the use of more visual material such as film and video and out of school visits. Learning in Year 12 would benefit from students spending more time preparing themselves for discussion and written work in lessons. Students generally are very capable, conscientious, well-motivated and over Years 12 and 13 develop into very competent historians.
171. The AS and 'A'-level courses are very competently managed. The provision is well coordinated with staff that teach the subject working very well together. Work is very well marked and comments made on how work can be further improved are very helpful. Accommodation is too widely scattered and needs rationalising. Resources are good but ICT facilities are inadequate

for independent study. The previous inspections high standards have been sustained and there is good capacity to develop courses.

Psychology

Provision for psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is characterised by secure subject knowledge and thorough lesson planning and preparation.
- There is good quality marking of student assignments
- The positive relationships in lessons promote effective learning.
- There is insufficient variety in teaching methods used.

Commentary

172. Psychology is a relatively new subject in the sixth form, having only been introduced in September 2001.
173. Standards achieved by the first Y13 group examined at 'A'-level in the summer of 2003 were above average with all students obtaining A-C grades. Standards of work seen in lessons were well above average. Overall, achievement is very good.
174. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. This is reflected in thorough lesson planning and preparation and good quality marking of student assignments. Teaching is enthusiastic and motivating with lessons delivered at a good pace. Skilful questioning by the teacher encouraged students to be suitably analytic and critical when exploring subject content. It also provided them with opportunities to rehearse and consolidate prior learning and to identify connections between subject themes. Marking of student assignments is of a high standard and usually informs them of what they have done well, what was not done well, and on ways to improve future assignments. Students value this feedback and are generally very positive about the support they receive in this subject.
175. Lessons observed were characterised mainly by teacher-presented material and teacher-led discussions. There is a need for the more consistent use of different teaching methods so that students have more opportunities for independent learning. This, and the greater use of multi-media/ICT resources, would provide students with enhanced learning opportunities. Tuition in a laboratory is a hindrance to the free flow of discussion. The availability of alternative accommodation is, however, being investigated by the teacher in charge.
176. Students learn and achieve very well. Important contributory factors are their high motivation for learning, their ability to sustain concentration and their excellent attitudes and behaviour. Students are responsive in discussion and respectful of the views of others.
177. The teacher in charge has a clear vision for the development of psychology at the school and is providing good leadership of the subject in her first year in charge. Management of the subject is also good, with an evolving subject development plan to help shape future developments.
178. As a new subject, a solid foundation has been put into place. There is the potential for the provision to become very good. Psychology was not available at the time of the last inspection and so it is not possible to comment on the progress since that time.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was theatre studies; **art and design** was sampled. Three sixth form lessons were observed. Teaching and learning were good and standards average. Achievement was satisfactory.

Theatre Studies

Provision for theatre studies is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment in the AS and 'A'-level examinations in 2003 was well above average, maintaining consistently high standards.
- Teaching and learning are very good. Students are engaged and stimulated by very well-planned and well-informed teaching.
- Relationships in the classroom are very good giving students confidence to perform unselfconsciously.
- Students are very committed and show their enjoyment of the subject.

Commentary

179. Standards in the public examinations have been consistently well above national averages. The standards of work seen are also well above average. Students show good understanding of set texts. They respond to questions and volunteer ideas articulately, showing awareness of specialist terminology. They have very good recall of previous work. They have good knowledge and understanding of drama practitioners such as Brecht and Stanislavsky. Students are confident unselfconscious performers, showing good skills of voice, movement and the use of stage space. They have a very good capacity to improvise individually, in pairs and groups. They work very cooperatively. They have a very good capacity for evaluating their own work and that of their classmates. Students produce very good pieces of extended writing. They are able to respond thoughtfully to texts, write perceptive critical studies and detailed evaluations of their own work.
180. Achievement is very good. There is a range of attainment on entry to the course. All students entered are successful in gaining grades and many have gained the highest grades. The take up of students from AS into 'A' level is good and very few have not continued. Students work very well together, with commitment and evident enjoyment. They perform with confidence, unselfconsciously, and their progress is greater than might be expected.
181. Students find the course interesting and enjoyable. They enjoy the camaraderie in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. They find satisfaction in meeting the challenges of the work. They enjoy the good relationships they have with their classmates and their teachers.
182. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding which informs very good lesson planning. Lessons are appropriately demanding, with a variety of activity and good pace, but students are very comfortable in their relationships and so respond well, working with interest. Students' work is very thoroughly and helpfully assessed with clear guidance for improvement. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is good cooperation to ensure standardisation of assessment and diligent delivery of the requirements of the course. The accommodation for the subject is very good, enhancing students' experience.
183. Progress since the previous inspection is good. The subject has become firmly established in the sixth form and high standards have been maintained.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Some lessons in **product design and home economics** were seen – these subjects were not a focus for the sixth form inspection.

184. In a Years 12 and 13 **product design** lesson teaching and learning were good. Standards of work are above average; achievement is good. Students made good progress in the lesson. They are a little behind with coursework at this stage in the course, but the work seen in folios and products being developed are above average. Students with special educational needs have been well supported and achieve well.
185. In a Year 13 **home economics** lesson, teaching and learning were excellent. Standards of work are well above average; achievement is very good. The planning and structure of the lesson provided opportunities for students to make PowerPoint presentations to colleagues with great confidence and from an excellent knowledge base. Coursework was very well structured and researched.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good. Students respond enthusiastically.
- Standards are well above average.
- The quality of teaching is very good and leads to very good achievement.
- Assessment information is used very well to track students' progress.

Commentary

186. Standards are well above average with 100 per cent success in examinations and with, significantly, over 20% more A and B grades than the national data. Business results are also above the average for all subjects studied to Advanced level in the school's Sixth Form. Overall achievement is very good.
187. Students enjoy opportunities to experience live business situations and they are required to handle complex business concepts and exercise business decisions. Their views and business decisions are frequently challenged and they are capable of reasoned and confident argument. Students examine areas in great detail, for example, management and motivational models, the business and economic arguments for and against adopting the Euro, market segmentation, the relative merits of different business organisation models, setting business objectives and handling business finance formulae. Students are capable of articulating their understanding and demonstrate confidence applying their knowledge to new and real business situations. All students are 'stretched'. They consistently achieve grades beyond those anticipated. Overall standards are well above average; achievement is very good.
188. Some students in the sixth form have specific learning difficulties: they are extremely well supported and they play a full and equal part in lessons; they achieve well above expectations. Notwithstanding the overall excellent provision and grades being well above the national average, there is some variation in performance at the highest (grade A & B) level in favour of girls. The department has adopted innovative strategies to counteract this bias, with boys already showing evidence of responding well to a more 'competitive' environment.
189. The quality of teaching and learning is very good; it is often excellent. Teaching is well planned and organised in 'bite-sized chunks' both pre and post-16. Targets for students are clearly

articulated and recorded. Materials and methods are varied and always of high presentational quality. Learning, too, is extremely well structured. Students at all levels respond well to this approach. Frequent and consistent use is made of real business situations and business links are routinely used to complement case studies and research. A good example of this is where an experienced managing director is thoroughly briefed and is then able to complement sixth form students' study of motivational theory in leading a discussion on the approaches to motivation during the establishment of a new company. Students are interested and are always engaged in their work. Their learning is consistently very good and sometimes excellent. They enjoy the variety of approaches, work at a good pace and respond with enthusiasm to challenges. By the age of 18, students demonstrate particular strengths in research, in the use of ICT, in manipulating data, in articulating their knowledge and understanding and in applying their skills in business situations. Of particular note is the ability of students to manage their own learning and progress.

190. The overall quality leadership and management is excellent; it is central to the department's success. There is a strong team ethos and clear, well-documented and consistently applied procedures. Staff are well supported and their achievements recognised and applauded. Continuous improvement is a standing agenda item at regular team meetings and strategies are effective in raising standards to even higher levels. Departmental resources are deployed efficiently and effectively. The department is maximising the potential offered through the school's recently acquired business and enterprise college status. Teachers and students benefit from a high quality business environment in which to work and there are measurable gains in the quality of students' work as a result of increased business links and the ready availability of ICT resources. Business education makes a significant contribution to the development of key skills. As a result, business students demonstrate a high degree of confidence and maturity.
191. A good department at the time of the previous inspection is now an excellent one. The department manages Advanced Vocational level Information Technology in the sixth form and this benefits from the same approaches, high standards and performance as those described above. Students with learning difficulties are effectively supported whilst providing challenge to the most gifted. The department has grown in terms of provision and in terms of the number of students opting into this area. Over the same period it has improved standards year on year to its current position where it is a major strength of the school.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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