

INSPECTION REPORT

Robert Smyth School

Market Harborough

LEA area: Leicestershire

Unique reference number: 120237

Headteacher: Colin Dean

Lead inspector: Graham Preston

Dates of inspection: 1st- 5th December 2003

Inspection number: 259289

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	14-19
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1212
School address:	Burnmill Road Market Harborough
Postcode:	LE16 7JG
Telephone number:	01858 440 770
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Max Corney
Date of previous inspection:	2 nd March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Robert Smyth is a mixed 14-19 comprehensive school and is part of the Leicestershire school system. It is a large, well regarded school with a third of its students in the sixth form. It has been a Technology College for the last five years and this has promoted development in the science, ICT and design and technology areas. Its promotion of visual and performing arts was recently recognised by the Artsmark award and the school is further involved in other initiatives that include the Prince's Trust, Young Enterprise and Duke of Edinburgh awards. The school roll has increased steadily, mainly because of the growing local population, and its intake is now almost entirely drawn from the two feeder high schools in the Market Harborough area. Those students come from both the town and outlying villages with over half travelling by bus. The intake is very mixed, though students are almost all of white British backgrounds with the majority from above average socio-economic homes. Students whose first language is not English are very few and these usually have sound language skills. The two feeder schools have varying educational standards but overall, students come to the school with Year 9 attainment above the national average. About two thirds of the Year 11 students stay on in the sixth form and a small number come from surrounding schools. The proportion of students with special educational needs is well below national levels though the school does take in all local students and endeavours to meet the full range of learning needs.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1990	Graham Preston	Lead inspector	Health and social care (6 th form)
14066	Gill Hoggard	Lay inspector	
33139	Mark Wilson	Team inspector	Mathematics (incl. 6 th)
29742	Patricia Fyans	Team inspector	Science, chemistry (6 th form)
22423	Jon Lovgreen	Team inspector	English, media studies (6 th form)
12226	Caroline Clarke	Team inspector	English (6 th form)
2495	Brian Munden	Team inspector	Design and technology (incl. 6 th), information and communication technology (ICT) in main school
33135	Kim Ropek	Team inspector	Art and design (incl. 6 th)
10817	George Rayner	Sixth form co-ordinator	Geography, ICT (6 th form)
15075	Bryan Stephens	Team inspector	French (incl. 6 th), German, English as an additional language
31701	Graeme Rudland	Team inspector	Music
31192	John Stewart	Team inspector	Physical education (incl. 6 th)
31372	Bob Hardwick	Team inspector	Citizenship, special educational needs
17808	Susan Orpin	Team inspector	Geography (6 th form)
27492	John Barker	Team inspector	Business studies, economics (6 th form)
14633	Jean Bannister	Team inspector	History
32331	Peter Barnes	Team inspector	
30563	Jackie Pentlow	Team inspector	Religious education (incl. 6 th)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Robert Smyth is a well-regarded and effective school that has improved further in recent years. It provides a good education for its students who achieve well. The school is very well led and provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The achievement of most students is good, with above average results in most subjects.
- Effective teaching is particularly strong in the large sixth form.
- Leadership is very good and good management systems are developing well.
- Much improved assessment practices have some very good features.
- Care and guidance are good, particularly in the sixth form.
- Very good curriculum opportunities at GCSE and in the sixth form include a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Teachers and pastoral tutors do not consistently apply otherwise good school systems.
- Provision for the applied GCSE ICT course is unsatisfactory.
- A minority of students take some time in adjusting to the expectations of a new school adversely affecting attitudes and behaviour.

The school now reflects the good and, in some respects, very good provision found in the last report. That report was some years ago and a short period has intervened in which standards fell. The last two years have seen a significant improvement. The school has successfully addressed concerns raised in the last inspection about assessment practice and has improved teaching and learning. This reflects a continuing focus on staff development.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

GCSE and sixth form standards are above the national average overall, well above in some subject areas, reflecting **good achievement** and progress for the majority of students.

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	C	B	A	A
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	B	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 students attained at the end of Year 9.*

Standards have improved considerably in the last two years and are well above national average in terms of GCSE points score and above average for the proportion of 5A*-C grades gained. English and science results are well above average. Current standards are above national average in most subjects, including mathematics and well above in English and science. Students make good progress and achieve well in most subjects particularly in English, science, German and drama. Students use ICT confidently in many lessons though cope less well with applied GCSE ICT in the limited time allocated. Sixth form students make good and often very good progress and standards are above average in most subjects. Their average point scores per student are well above those nationally. The school has made clear progress in improving boys' attainment at GCSE and in the sixth form.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good as are attitudes and behaviour, particularly in the sixth form.

Students develop well in terms of their moral and social development. Attitudes and behaviour are **good** overall and **very good** in the sixth form. However, some GCSE students take time to adjust to the school and their casual attitude and sometimes challenging behaviour adversely affect progress in some lessons. Attendance is satisfactory but too many students are late to lessons. A significant number do not adhere to the school dress code.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education is good.

Students benefit from a **very good** range of courses at GCSE and the sixth form. Many students participate in the different extra-curricular activities. Students are generally well taught and cared for and value the constructive guidance they receive though tutor time is not always well used and tutors are not consistent in applying the good school systems. Good use is made of local college and other links to support the learning and training needs of particular students.

The overall quality of teaching is good with a substantial proportion of very good teaching in the sixth form.

Teaching is effective in most subjects reflecting the often very good specialist knowledge of staff that helps students learn well and reach the higher standards. Working relationships with students are mostly positive and the much improved assessment practice helps students make good progress. Students considered gifted and talented are sufficiently challenged, and others with special educational needs are well supported in their learning. The class management skills of some teachers are sometimes less effective in dealing with younger and less motivated students.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the school is very good and management systems are good. Governance is good.

The leadership provided by the headteacher and senior staff has been very effective in helping the school improve overall standards in recent years. This gives the school very clear direction and it is well regarded locally. The management systems are generally good and particularly strong in some aspects including finance, data management and assessment. The governors are a considerable strength of the school and help shape its direction, though they have not ensured that the school procedures for daily collective worship fully meet the requirement.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is valued by parents and almost all of those eligible choose it for their children. They are positive about almost all aspects and particularly appreciate the effective transfer arrangements from high schools. Some parents would like the school to more actively seek their views and the school is endeavouring to do this. Students appreciate the way the school treats them as young adults and value the range of courses and other opportunities. Some younger students felt that teachers did not always deal effectively with the misbehaviour of few.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that all staff consistently apply the often good school procedures to promote good behaviour, punctuality to lessons and appropriate dress codes.
- Share the best practices that help staff improve the teaching and class management of younger students, including those promoted in the 'Key Stage 3 National Strategy'.
- Improve provision for applied GCSE ICT through better learning programmes and more time.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Better provide for a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is effective and very well led. Students achieve well through **good** teaching and secure **above average** results in public examinations. Female students have historically achieved better but male students have improved to reduce the difference. Very few students fail to complete their courses. The large size and success of the sixth form makes it cost effective.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching, learning and students' achievement are good, and very good in some subjects.
- The curriculum meets students' needs very well with very good opportunities for enrichment.
- Assessment practices are strong and the new reporting procedures are excellent.
- Very good guidance enables students to make sound choices in the sixth form and for later university or employment.
- Very good attitudes of students contribute strongly to their achievement.
- The sixth form is very well led and mostly effectively managed.
- Students' lateness to lessons is too often accepted by teachers.
- Tutor group time is not always well used.
- The accommodation for the sixth form is barely adequate in size.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	English: Good . Students achieve well because of very well planned lessons and enthusiastic teaching. French: Good . Effective teaching and good achievement are based upon the good subject knowledge and linguistic skills of teachers, very good relationships and effective use of ICT.
Mathematics	Good . The good knowledge and understanding of teachers and enables students to achieve well. Gifted and talented students receive further mathematics and do well.
Science	Chemistry: Very good . Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan stimulating lessons. Students respond enthusiastically to the challenge of chemistry and achieve well as a result. In sampled subjects, the teaching seen and students' achievement was very good in physics and environmental science and good in biology.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory . Students generally maintain average standards in their work, but do not succeed in representing this in their examination results.
Humanities	Geography: Good . Teaching and learning are good and students respond well. A very strong programme of fieldwork makes a very good contribution to students' achievement. Religious education: Good . Good teaching and a very good assessment structure are leading to good achievement. Teaching and achievement were good in history and satisfactory in sociology, both sampled subjects.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Product Design: Very good . Achievement is very good because programmes of work are well organised and teaching is very good. Very enthusiastic students benefited from good teaching seen in a sampled textiles lesson.
Visual and performing arts and media	Art: Good . Effective teaching, based upon good subject expertise, results in students achieving well. Media studies: Very good . Teaching is very good, combining knowledge and enthusiasm with an excellent awareness of examination requirements. Four other subjects were sampled. Teaching and learning, and the resulting achievement, were seen to be excellent in dance, very good in theatre studies and good in music and music technology.
Hospitality, sports, Leisure and travel	Physical education: Good . Teachers plan lessons so that learning is good and the positive response of students contributes to their achievement. Teaching and students' response was satisfactory in a sampled lesson of leisure and recreation .
Business	Economics: Very good . The teamwork between subject specialists, very effective teaching and very good relationships, support students in achieving very well. Good relationships and satisfactory achievement were evident in a sampled business lesson.
Health and social care	Good . The good teaching contributes well to students' personal development and they achieve well.
General Education	This area was sampled. A very good programme of sessions led by visiting speakers, includes some excellent activities, in which students are encouraged to be highly involved and to develop objective views.

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 benefit from **very good** advice and guidance particularly in regard to educational choices including those for higher education. **Good** support is provided by teachers and relationships with students are usually very positive. However, staff are not rigorous enough in the use of tutor time and in their enforcement of school rules.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership of the sixth form is very good and management is good. A clear vision is shared by the leadership team, who work effectively together to lead a successful sixth form in which students achieve well. Communication with houses and subjects is very good and the opinions of students are sought and acted upon. Day-to-day administration is good, though managers have not been so effective in ensuring tutors and teachers enforce school rules.

STUDENTS' VIEW OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very positive about the sixth form. Nine out of ten students enjoy being in the sixth form and think it is well run. Similar proportions value the range of courses as well as the good teaching and staff expertise. Most think that work is assessed helpfully and that they are encouraged to study with greater independence. They certainly consider teachers and tutors to be accessible and helpful and value the very strong provision in careers and guidance.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Most students achieve well at GCSE and in the sixth form. Standards have improved considerably and are now **above average** overall, with some well above average attainment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall GCSE results have risen significantly and high standards are being sustained in the current Year 11.
- Standards are well above national average in GCSE science and English and students make very good progress.
- Advanced level results in the sixth form have been sustained and the students' average points scores are well above national average.
- In contrast to some of the good quality ICT work seen in some subjects, students' progress and current achievement is unsatisfactory in the applied GCSE ICT course.
- Most students take GCSE French or German and achieve well, particularly in German.
- There are clear indications that boys' GCSE and A level performance is improving.

Commentary

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

	School results	National results 2003
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	64 (56)	52.6 (51.6)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95 (95)	86.3 (88.9)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (97)	96 (94.6)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	39.2 (37.1)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 373 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

1. The table above shows that standards have improved steadily and on all measures are above the national average. This has been part of a continuing trend after 2001 when GCSE standards fell considerably. During that period the prior attainment of students coming from the feeder high schools has not varied appreciably so the rise in GCSE standards represent real improvements in students' achievement. Much of this can be attributed to improvements in school management and teaching provision.

2. GCSE standards in all three core subjects of English, science and mathematics, have risen considerably in the last two years. In the 2003 GCSE examinations English and science were well above average against all schools as well as those schools with similar student intakes. Mathematics improved from a below average position to be a little above the GCSE national average and in line with the results in similar schools. Most other GCSE subjects achieved above average results and particularly significant were those in French and German. Standards in French were around national average but this is good because most students at the school continue to take a language at GCSE unlike the situation in many other schools where only the more competent and better motivated tend to take GCSE languages.

3. Standards seen in the inspection broadly reflected the recent GCSE results. Those in English are well above average and reflect very good achievement. Students are able to make their

own detailed notes plan well and write at length using a wide and accurate vocabulary. In the absence of a whole school literacy policy, practice across different subjects is more variable. Opportunities for discussion and other oral work are patchy, particularly in history, geography and ICT and listening skills are also lacking in some areas. Even so, the strong focus on written work in terms of its quality has been a factor in the school's improving GCSE standards.

4. Students come to the school with above average mathematical and numerical knowledge and skills and make satisfactory progress in the GCSE course to achieve standards above national average. The numeracy skills of most students are above average though this is more the result of the work of the feeder high schools than a consequence of a clear numeracy strategy in the school.

5. Standards seen in science are well above average with higher attaining students working at higher GCSE grade levels.

6. Standards in ICT are variable. Students come to the school with good knowledge and skills and continue to practise and develop these in some subjects. However, current work in the GCSE applied ICT course is of a below average standard and too many students underachieve. This has more to do with the limited timetabled time to cover the work and lack of engaging activities as many students have the necessary ICT skills to make sufficient progress.

7. Student achievement in all other subjects is often good, particularly in drama, food technology and German. The extent to which girls do better than boys at GCSE has been higher in the school than that found nationally. This has now narrowed, most notably in science, drama, English and history where boys have been improving at a faster rate.

8. Although students, on average, achieve well in their GCSE subjects and have increasingly done so, there is a small but significant level of student distraction that slows progress in some lessons. It affects a considerable number of subjects, particularly in the middle and lower ability sets, and includes science, mathematics, English, physical education and ICT. In part it is related to the competence and experience of the teacher but it also indicates that some students, often boys, do not have sufficient self-control and respect for others.

9. Students with special educational needs achieve well in their GCSE examinations. Records kept of their progress from the time of their entry into school are very good and show, after re-testing, that good progress is generally made with reading. Students with special educational needs generally make good progress in line with their peers as, for example, in a design and technology coursework project seen, which was of a very high standard. Gifted and talented students are well challenged in several subjects, such as English and science, and have opportunities for extended study in extra-curricular activities too.

10. The school currently has a small number of students with English as an additional language, but none is at an early stage of English language acquisition. There is a policy statement on English as an additional language included in the school's inclusion policy. Occasionally, one or two students with English as an additional language require support in English in order to achieve their full potential. On these occasions the school liaises well with outside agencies to provide specialist teaching and support them well in lessons. Consequently these students make good progress in English and in other areas of the curriculum.

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	95 (98)	97.8 (97)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	35 (30)	44.2 (42)
Average point score per student	291 (296)	252.4 (254.7)

There were 135 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

11. Standards in the sixth form are clearly above average on a subject by subject basis and when students' overall Advanced level results are aggregated, those at Robert Smyth achieve well above national average points scores as indicated in the table above. The very small fall in average point scores compared with 2002 has to be set against the students' previous GCSE results which were the lowest in the school's recent history. Therefore, most sixth form students made considerable progress in their Advanced level courses and achieved well. Girls continue to do better, though boys have narrowed the gap in overall achievement.

12. The sixth form provides one-year vocational courses for those not able to work at Advanced level at that point. Those GNVQ Intermediate students taking business studies, leisure and tourism or manufacturing reached standards in line with those nationally with over 80 per cent gaining full awards.

13. Current standards reflect recent examination results with students making good progress in most subjects. Students taking English, product design and media studies achieve very well and in some individual lessons such as dance, economics and general studies, students were observed making excellent progress. In sixth form observations as a whole, students achieved well in most lessons and very well in a third. Much of this corresponds to the largely good and often very good teaching.

14. Students' standards in both numeracy and literacy are above average. Although standards on the A Level ICT course are average, when students use computers in their other subjects, or for individual study, they show standards that are above average for those not taking a specialist course.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attitudes and behaviour are mostly **good** and **very good** in the sixth form though too many students are late to lessons.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sixth form students exhibit very good attitudes and behaviour.
- Social development is particularly good especially in ICT, English, music and sport.
- Unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes exist among a significant minority of students, mostly but not exclusively in Year 10.
- Punctuality to lessons is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

15. Attendance is satisfactory at a figure close to the national average, and the school has tight procedures to reinforce it. Punctuality, however, is unsatisfactory. Many students – and some teachers – show a lack of urgency at the start of lessons and some students drift in up to ten minutes late, diminishing their learning time considerably.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	6.68%
National data	7.5%

Unauthorised absence	
School data	1.5%
National data	1.1%

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

16. Attitudes and behaviour in the main school vary from good to unsatisfactory. Students are mostly very positive about school, enjoy coming and participate with enthusiasm in extra curricular activities such as music and sport. Year 11 students in the top maths set, for example, showed tremendous enthusiasm and application as they worked on problems involving factorisation. Large numbers of students are involved in competitive sports such as football and basketball matches, both in inter-house matches and against other schools. Students expressed satisfaction with much of what the school offers them, particularly the range of options at GCSE and in sport.

17. Although most students behave well most of the time, a significant minority do not: particularly, but not only, Year 10 boys. They display a cavalier attitude to punctuality, to uniform and dress code, and to learning. On a number of occasions behaviour was poor enough to disrupt learning, usually linked to weaker methods of behaviour management. For example in a Year 10 ICT lesson, a number of small groups were negative and unresponsive. Even when behaviour is reasonable, students' attitudes can be less than enthusiastic: Year 11 boys in an English lesson analysing poetry, for example, made little effort to contribute to the discussion. The table shows that exclusions are relatively high but this reflects the school's determination to clamp down on unacceptable behaviour.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1070	89	1
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5	1	
Mixed – White and Black African	1	2	
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	3	
No ethnic group recorded	74	40	1

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

18. Personal development is good overall, with particular strengths in social development. Many subjects use group and pair work; English makes a strong contribution through looking at people in society, and music offers students the chance to form their own bands. There are many trips and visits to support learning and develop a greater multi-cultural awareness, such as a recent German trip to Saarbrücken, as well as an expedition to Tanzania which involved working with a link school there. Moral values are developed to some extent in subjects such as geography, which looks at environmental impact, and through tutor time and assemblies. There are, however, inconsistencies in the application of the school's behaviour rules and dress code.

19. Spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory, but not planned systematically into the curriculum. Odd moments of revelation occur, such as students' amazement in geology at discovering that shells can be found on Everest - and food technology looks at food in a variety of different countries. Despite some good practice such as the overseas trips, multicultural awareness is low neither preparing students for life in modern Britain nor celebrating the background of the few ethnic minority students in the school. Art, unusually, makes little contribution to cultural development.

Sixth form

20. Attendance is satisfactory and there are good procedures for ensuring students register themselves when entering or leaving the site. Punctuality, however, is unsatisfactory and the late start to lessons and subsequent loss of learning time found in Years 10-11 also applies in the sixth form.

21. Other than this, attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are generally very good and sometimes excellent. Students are enthusiastic and positive about school life and enjoy the more adult treatment from staff. They particularly commend the induction and careers guidance they have received and the range of enrichment activities on offer. Students often show very good attitudes to learning. For example, in a Year 12 lesson looking at developing fuel, there were very supportive relationships and students seized the opportunity to assess their own research needs. Retention rates on courses are good as most students are well advised and have made an active choice to come into the sixth form.

22. Personal development is good in the sixth form. There is an impressive range of outside speakers, such as the local bishop and M.P.- and opportunities such as Young Enterprise which is supported by a local bank. Very able students can take Open University courses and a good number of sixth formers have undergone training to be peer mentors to Year 11. Sixth formers also get involved in sports coaching and links with primary schools.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education is **good**. Students benefit from a very good range of courses at GCSE and the sixth form. Many students participate in the different extra-curricular activities. Students are generally well taught and cared for and value the constructive guidance they receive. Staff establish good relationships with students but tutor time is not always well used and staff as both teachers and tutors do not consistently apply the school procedures. Good use is made of local college and other links to support the learning and training needs of particular students.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching is good with a substantial proportion of very good sixth form teaching. As a result, students learn well and become increasingly independent in their thinking. Assessment practice is good, having improved considerably, and data is used most effectively in planning improvements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well-informed teaching and good working relationships lead to the good achievement of most students.
- Sixth form teaching is particularly strong with over a third of lessons being very good or better.
- The better teaching is well planned; the varied content and clear purpose of lessons engage student interest and sustain their concentration on what they need to learn.
- ICT is well used in some lessons and enhances learning.
- Learning assistants provide valuable lesson support for students with special educational needs.
- Some staff are not effective enough in managing the younger and less well-motivated students.
- There is inconsistency among teachers in insisting upon punctuality to lessons and appropriate behaviour.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 190 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5 (2.6%)	53 (27.9%)	76 (40%)	49 (25.8%)	6 (3.2%)	1 (0.5%)	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.

23. Teaching and learning in the GCSE courses are good. Only in about one lesson in twenty was teaching judged to be unsatisfactory and this represents a considerable improvement since the last inspection. Two thirds of lessons seen were well taught and a fifth of all GCSE teaching was judged to be very good.

24. Almost all teaching benefits from having specialists and the teachers' often very good knowledge and higher expectations enable students to reach the higher grades. This was evident in the work of the higher and fast track groups where students complete more challenging work.

25. The teachers' personal enthusiasm and high expectations, allied to careful planning, are a feature of much very good teaching, for example in both the food and textiles technology lessons where students worked independently and produced high quality outcomes.

26. Lesson planning is more variable. It is best in those subjects such as science, some design and technology areas and English, where teachers have successfully adopted the structured and varied approaches being promoted as part of the national 'Key Stage 3 Strategy' being used with eleven to fourteen year olds. Those lessons have clear learning outcomes with greater pace so better engaging the interest of students and maintaining their concentration throughout.

27. Another feature of good teaching that involves students well is the use of different resources as stimulus materials, seen in a very good religious education lesson and many science and design and technology lessons. Effective use of ICT is also a strong feature in some lessons, particularly English where it is used both to enhance learning and for drafting and redrafting skills.

28. Teachers mostly succeed in establishing positive working relationships with students but a significant number of even good and experienced staff have less strong behaviour management skills. The school makes considerable effort to ensure the smooth transition of students from the two main feeder high schools. This is largely successful but after some weeks a minority of the students, particularly boys from the middle and lower sets, exhibit their growing confidence by attempting to push the boundaries of what counts as acceptable behaviour. This results in inappropriate talkativeness, calling out and lateness to lessons. Teachers that plan lessons well, are decisive and insist upon high standards, manage the situation well and learning is effective. This was well illustrated in a Year 10 construction studies course where students with behavioural needs were well supported and stayed on task. A number of teachers struggle with more difficult students and their weaker class management skills resulted in most of the unsatisfactory teaching seen. However, there were a number of other instances where generally well-organised lessons resulted in less effective learning because of the poor attitude and lack of effort of a minority. Most, though not all, of these problems diminish as teachers establish a rapport with classes and the school procedures begin to take effect.

29. Students with special educational needs achieve well because of the effective teaching they receive. Support assistants are a significant strength of the school and a key determinant of the impact of individual education plans (IEPs). Teachers are provided with well-written plans. These have the greatest impact where support teachers and learning support assistants are involved in the lesson planning and supporting the students. Teachers are usually conversant with IEPs although

their impact on learning varies. In English, the learning support assistant is involved in planning work with the teacher, monitoring progress and making good use of the IEPs. In ICT a student with special needs was seated in close proximity to the teacher, who knew his IEP and modified the teaching strategy accordingly.

30. The school also has a learning mentor who plays a very valuable and effective role in working with students who might otherwise be appropriately placed on the SEN register but who can, with occasional support, be well integrated into the normal curriculum.

31. Teachers mark work regularly and provide written and oral constructive feedback. The improved assessment systems used in most subjects, help students better understand the standard of their work and provide clearer guidance as to how they can improve. Teachers mostly keep good records, so that they know how well individual students are progressing and can set appropriate targets. Much of the good practice is evident in English, religious education, music, design and technology and media studies. Marking and assessment is always at least satisfactory but, in a few subjects, students are less clear about their progress and what they need to do to improve.

Sixth form

32. Teaching is good overall with a substantial proportion that is very good. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory and in over four fifths, teaching and learning were good or better. Excellent practice was seen in dance and the general studies programme. The good quality of teaching is a major factor in the well above average points scores the students achieve and how effectively they learn.

33. Teachers use their generally good and often very good subject knowledge to plan lessons that are well structured, stimulating and well matched to examination requirements. This effectively helps students to develop higher-level understanding and skills. The teachers' expertise and the intellectual challenge they provide in lessons were two of the most positive features identified by students. The good working relationships that teachers establish are a feature of most lessons and result in students' readiness to learn.

34. In most subjects, students are encouraged to participate in discussions and share ideas. They are encouraged to discuss their learning needs openly and teachers make themselves available to support them, another positive aspect identified by students. Even so, there are a number of subjects where students are less actively involved in their learning, relying more on the teacher to provide information. Even in the many good lessons, the teachers' high expectations about students' effort and progress do not extend to ensuring students attend punctually, often resulting in a loss of lesson time.

35. The sixth form has benefited from the very good school data analysis and record keeping that tracks students more carefully and helps to evaluate and improve teaching and curriculum provision.

The curriculum

The school curriculum is very broad and considerably enhanced by the range of enrichment and extra-curricular provision. Resources are generally **good** and accommodation **satisfactory**, though cramped in parts for the number of students.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good curriculum breadth exists in Years 10 and 11, incorporating some alternative educational programmes as well as a strong core that includes modern foreign languages.
- The large sixth form size enables a very wide range of courses and enrichment activities including general studies.
- Very good extra-curricular opportunities, particularly with the extended day, exist across the whole school.
- Personal development programmes including careers guidance are very strong across the whole school.
- Curriculum planning is good in most subjects but limited time in applied GCSE ICT results in less effective learning programmes.
- Staffing and other resources support the curriculum well though technology facilities are limited given the school's Technology College status.
- The lack of whole school strategies to promote literacy, numeracy and ICT results in missed opportunities to further strengthen students' basic skills.

Commentary

36. The school has a very good curriculum in Years 10 and 11, which is broad and balanced and meets all statutory requirements in terms of subjects. Despite its best efforts the school does not meet statutory requirements in relation to a daily act of worship. There is a very strong core, including either a modern foreign language to GCSE or a vocational course in business studies or travel and tourism (with an NVQ French dimension).

37. The curriculum is very good in English, modern foreign languages, business studies and for students with special educational needs and for the gifted and talented. It is good in maths, science, history, music, physical education and religious education and satisfactory in all other subjects. All students take a GCSE in ICT, but the allocation of time for the double GCSE award is insufficient and impacts negatively on standards and achievement. There is a very good programme to promote students' personal development, provide career advice and organise vocational placements.

38. The curriculum is fully inclusive and offers support in coursework for students with special educational needs and also organises a specially adapted curriculum for disaffected students and students who were permanently excluded from the feeder high schools.

39. Standards in literacy, mathematics and ICT across the curriculum are above average, but the college does not sufficiently monitor and evaluate these cross-curricular strands in order to raise standards further.

40. Students with special educational needs are generally well integrated into the life of the school and follow largely the same curriculum as their peers. Help with homework is regularly available. There is some carefully managed withdrawal into "Additional Support" for students who will benefit from a reduced GCSE load. A small number of students are able to follow learning opportunities off-site in local colleges, although this is difficult to sustain for logistical reasons such as transport.

41. The school provides a rich and varied programme of experiences for all students. This includes activities for Years 10 and 11. A particular feature, new since the last inspection, is the additional 'period 7' session, three days a week after school. This enables extra GCSEs, mathematics support and enhancement opportunities.

42. Art, drama and music activities are well supported by students and include widely varied opportunities such as orchestra, ensembles and rock bands to artists in residence and enabled the school to gain Artsmark.

43. The honours programme for gifted and talented students recently benefited from a High Court judge's visit, stimulating one student to consider work shadowing a judge.

44. Trips include skiing, canoeing, the World Challenge, sixth form business and languages visits to Barcelona and Rome as well as languages visits to Germany. The Duke of Edinburgh Award attracts large numbers at gold and silver levels and there is a wide range of high quality extra curricular sports activities.

Sixth form

45. The curriculum in Years 12 and 13 is also very good and helped by the extra period at the end of the day for extra subjects such as Advanced level textiles and photography. The provision of general studies enables the school to meet its religious education requirement but does not fulfil its obligation to provide effectively for a daily act of worship. There is a very wide choice of over 30 academic and vocational courses on offer. Students can take a full or reduced Advanced level programme or a one year GNVQ intermediate course linked to appropriate GCSEs. Course entry requirements are appropriate and clearly defined.

46. There is a very good enrichment programme. All students taking a full Advanced level course are additionally expected to take A level general studies. As part of enrichment, all students in the sixth form are expected to take at least one of the OCR key skills courses in communication, application of number or information technology. The sixth form students are also actively involved in the wide range of extra-curricular activities outlined above.

47. At subject level the curriculum is excellent in economics and business studies, very good in English language and literature, media studies, drama, design and technology and music. It is good in mathematics, chemistry, art, history, geography, ICT, physical education and religious education. Currently there are no students taking German at A level. Career advice and support for applications for further and higher education are very good.

48. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is good. Classes are mainly taught by specialist teachers though less so in mathematics. Support staff are good in most areas, particularly English and modern foreign languages. The very skilled music technician takes an effective role in supporting students in learning how to use music technology to create and record music. Students with special educational needs are well supported and the SEN unit is a small but valuable resource.

49. Resources are good overall and very good in some subjects such as English, modern foreign languages and business studies. The range of resources in the library is only adequate though the majority of departments are well resourced in terms of books and computers. Computers have been increased throughout the school as a result of the school's funding as a Technology College and the ratio of computers to students is above the national average.

50. The initial development of design and technology resources and accommodation through the Technology College initiative has not been sustained. Currently, many of the resources and accommodation in design and technology are dated and not well matched to the current curriculum needs. The school recognises the need to address this.

51. Overall, accommodation is satisfactory though barely adequate in the sixth form. There are some weaknesses too in performing arts and science. Part of this is the result of a very full school and comparatively modest funding.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety are **good**. Systems are also good for support, guidance and behaviour management, including those for school transfer, though they are inconsistently applied.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Support and guidance in the sixth form is very good.
- The very good induction procedures of students into Year 10 are inhibited by inconsistent application.
- Students with special educational needs are well supported and enjoy school.
- The school seeks the views of students through the school council but students sometimes feel their opinions do not result in change.
- Year 11 students feel more positive about the school than those in Year 10.
- Sixth form students are very positive about the help and support they receive.

Commentary

52. Arrangements for the care of students are good. There are no significant issues with the application of the procedures for child protection, first aid and health and safety, although some points were raised with the school during the inspection.

53. Parents are very pleased with the arrangements for settling their children into school at the age of 14. Very good procedures include interviewing all the students, a three-day induction programme and bridging coursework. However, there are inconsistencies in how the bridging work and work set on the induction days is followed up. A minority of students, often boys, take longer to settle in school.

54. The school uses the house system to create smaller and more supportive pastoral care groups within the very large year groups and this is generally effective. Certainly the house tutors establish good relationships with students though tutor time is often not used for any planned activities. There are clear school rules and procedures and the senior managers, including pastoral heads, work hard to maintain a calm and positive learning environment. However, while the school staff, as a whole, are committed to establishing good relationships and helping students do well in their subjects, there is less attention to and consistency in ensuring students behave and dress appropriately and get to lessons on time.

55. Very good support is provided for students with special educational needs. The Special Needs Coordinator organises the induction of students with special needs through very good liaison with feeder high schools and through careful analysis and testing of reading skills determines who needs to be on the register. The referral system, which is open to all teachers, provides a very good mechanism by which the Guidance and Support Committee can regularly consider individual needs and review the register. The learning mentor plays a very valuable and effective role in working with students who might otherwise be appropriately placed on the register but who can, with occasional support be well integrated into the normal curriculum.

56. The systems of guidance and support for students, along with the assessment procedures, have greatly improved since the last inspection. Teachers provide effective support and guidance in their lessons by making clear, for example, exactly what the requirements for gaining good GCSE grades are. All Year 11 students also have good access to external careers advisers and the overall careers guidance is very good. Students continuing into the sixth form have an induction programme in the summer term of Year 11 when they study their chosen AS subjects and this allows for changes to be made where desired. Students have Year 13 students as peer mentors to support them. Students are involved in setting and reviewing their targets although there is some inconsistency between subjects.

57. The school seeks to involve the students in decision-making and the school council has been re-established. As yet students cannot identify areas where they have had an impact and the sixth formers involved recognise that there have been some communication issues. Year 11 students are more positive about the school in general, an indication that those in Year 10 are still undergoing a settling-in process.

Sixth form

58. Relationships in the sixth form are strong and, even if students are less likely to seek staff support regarding some personal issues, they greatly value the help and support they receive in their studies. Overall, that support and guidance is very good. Students are also pleased with the careers guidance and advice relating, as much of it does, to university choices and application. In this area they benefit from ongoing guidance and careers and higher education days. Some are less impressed with the work of Connexions, the external careers service.

59. Relations with tutors are good though at times those positive relationships result in a more relaxed attitude to the use of tutor time which is often wasted. Although students accept responsibility for their studies and mostly succeed, a considerable number get to lessons late and disregard the school dress code. In these areas staff appear over-tolerant.

60. Students are involved in the school acting as mentors and prefects, participating in various councils and interviewing prospective staff. They have some concerns that their opinions are not always considered but also recognise that the school does have broader considerations. In general they are very positive about the school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school is valued by the local community and has **good** links with parents, schools and other organisations.

Main strengths

- A good and improving range of information is provided for parents.
- Parents' views are very positive.
- Links with the local community are very good and the school is outward-looking.
- There are good links with other schools and colleges, very good in the sixth form.

Commentary

61. Parents are extremely positive about all aspects of the school's work, though a relatively small proportion of them responded to questionnaires or came to the meeting. They particularly praise induction procedures, the school ethos and standards, especially in the sixth form, and greatly approve of the range of options and extra activities offered. The Friends of Robert Smyth are a small but dynamic group who do a great deal to support the school through fundraising and social events.

62. The school generally communicates well with parents through a variety of means: a professionally-produced prospectus, a rapidly expanding website and annual reports, which have recently been redesigned.

63. Very good links with the community enrich and strengthen learning. A number of local businesses supported the school's bid for technology college status and continue the link through, for example, offering work experience for year 10 students. The school is very much open to use by the local community too, ranging from Guides using the internet, plays and concerts open to the public and volunteer work in the on-site Arboretum. There are a large number of trips and visits, for example in modern languages, which support learning well.

64. Some Year 10 students attend college part-time and students from a local university come in on teaching practice. There are also lots of links through inter-school and county competitions in sports, such as football and netball.

65. There are good links with local schools and colleges in the main school, particularly bridging links in subjects. Design and technology, French, English and religious education are all areas where students begin modules in the feeder schools which are then continued and expanded at Robert Smyth.

66. Communication and links with feeder schools in provision for special educational needs is also good. The special needs coordinator organises the induction of the students concerned through very good liaison with feeder middle schools. Through careful analysis and testing of reading skills, the co-ordinator determines who needs to be on the register. The referral system, which is open to all teachers, provides a very good mechanism by which the guidance and support committee can regularly consider individual needs and review the register.

67. Parental attendance at reviews is very good and full account is taken of their views. Students are fully involved in the reviews. Relationships with the other professionals such as the county educational psychologist, the Connexions service and a specialist in visual impairment, are very good.

Sixth form

68. The sixth form management is energetic and outward-looking in forging links with the local community and other educational institutions. Year 13 have a terrific range of outside speakers for their enrichment programme, ranging from a Euro MP to a representative from the prison service. Local businesses are very supportive, helping out with mock interviews for example and supporting Young Enterprise.

69. Sporting activities remain important in the sixth form, both in competitive fixtures and educational links, such as the Olympic sports day, involving a local primary school and organised by sixth formers.

70. There are very good links with colleges and universities: local college lecturers come in to teach electronics at AS and A level, and there are connections with another university in Leicester, for example in art and design: the school's department collaborated with that at the university to produce an undergraduate brochure.

71. Students' views are mostly positive: they feel they have had good advice and are well supported; teaching is challenging and teachers are helpful and supportive. A few feel less happy about the help they get from the external careers service and quite a number complain about canteen prices!

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The governance of the school is **good**. The leadership of the headteacher and other members of the senior management team is **very good**. Management systems are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governing body is very well informed and makes significant contributions to the school's operation and development.
- The leadership and vision of the headteacher are very good, strongly supported by the senior management team and other key staff.
- The governors and the headteacher have high ambitions for the school.
- A whole-school ethos is committed to participation by all members and individual achievement.
- Strategic and financial planning reflect the school's aims, including curriculum developments.
- Data and management information are used effectively to support monitoring and improvement.
- Statutory requirements are not fully met in relation to a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

72. The leadership of the headteacher is distinctive and ambitious, with a clear vision. He is moving forward a whole-school ethos which has a declared emphasis on people, the provision of opportunities for everyone to achieve, and progressively higher standards. The emphasis is acknowledged to be more on the comprehensive nature of the school than on its technology status. An openness of communication is associated with sound planning systems. The first consideration when seeking to extend student experiences is around educational goals rather than immediate funding levels. Effective leadership and teamwork are developed at all levels and strategic thinking encouraged. The leadership team and other key staff are closely associated with the school drive to raise standards.

73. Management systems are generally good and have in recent years been developed very successfully in some aspects. Data management and assessment are employed expertly to monitor and review performance and they establish a secure basis for appropriate action. Well devised performance management procedures, faculty reviews and use of staff questionnaires, all provide examples of the school's effective approach to the evaluation of provision. The school rightly places considerable emphasis on improving teaching and learning as part of staff training and development programmes. The recruitment and deployment of staff are also very well managed.

74. Pastoral care and behaviour management is an area that has been less successful, in that there has not yet been established, among all staff, a more consistent application of the high expectations and strong systems set up.

75. An experienced governor has oversight of special educational needs and provides regular information to the governing body. The governor is well informed about the work of the department and confident in approaching senior staff and the headteacher who are very supportive of the SEN work in the school. The governors enhance SEN staffing by additional funding that includes support for the post of learning mentor. The school meets its statutory requirements in the matter of statements of special educational needs.

76. The governors are very active in their commitment to the school. The committee structure and the working relationships with the senior team ensure that governors are consistently well informed and have a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and priorities for development. A very good balance of support and challenge is provided and this is central to their contributions on strategic and operational issues. For example, annual decisions on premises expenditure are made

with direct reference to curriculum needs and pursuit of higher standards. The statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not fully met.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3439656	Balance from previous year	29974
Total expenditure	3492317	Balance carried forward to the next	-52661
Expenditure per student	3118		

77. Financial and resources control is very effective and it is monitored securely through an internal as well as external system. The budget is being maintained in balance by following the principles of best value, and through rigorous information on areas of expenditure related to planning decisions. Administration procedures and premises management throughout the school are very efficiently based on good communication and practices.

Sixth form

78. Very good leadership, on the part of the head of sixth form and the headteacher, provides a clear direction for the development of the sixth form, and is well supported by senior management, governors and the staff of the school.

79. The head of sixth form works very effectively with a leadership team of three assistants, who share a strong commitment and view of how post 16 education should move forward in the school. Communication is very good within this team and with the school’s houses and subject areas. Subject links are strongly enhanced by a system of formal links between each sixth form leader and designated subjects.

80. Overall daily administrative arrangements, systems and procedures work well. In support of this, sixth form tutors benefit from attending a two-day training event, which provides good initial guidance on how to carry out their pastoral and administrative roles. Even so, timetabled tutor time is often not used to the best effect and there is some inconsistency in applying the school’s dress code for the sixth form and expectations for punctuality.

81. The sixth form leaders welcome students’ own opinions, seeking them through a students’ forum and regular surveys, listening with an open mind and making sincere attempts to cater for them. This had led to changes being made, for example in the way in which the general studies course is run. The leadership team has a healthily self-critical approach to monitoring how well such steps work, continuing to consider how they could be further improved.

82. The sixth form is cost-effective, with the benefits of its large size being utilised fully to provide a wide range of well-subscribed courses, in which teaching and learning are good and students achieve well.

EXAMPLES OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

Example of outstanding practice

The school has worked at improving its assessment and reporting systems and the new parents’ reports reflect excellent practice.

The new versions of parents’ reports are excellent. They use a common format across all subjects, thus standardising reporting in a way that parents can understand. The first section requires students to evaluate their own work across broadly similar categories such as effort, meeting deadlines and contributions in class. Teachers add a comment as to how realistic these evaluations are and then assess the student further in several key areas, including current and predicted grades for public examinations. There are clear explanations for parents on the grading system used and a

simple one-page-per-subject layout, completed by the form tutor's overall comments at the end. The net result is a coherent format which allows parents and carers to compare progress easily in subjects as well as getting a good overview of the student's work.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGE 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average.
- Students achieve very well because of skilled and stimulating teaching.
- Leadership and management are excellent with strong teamwork.
- Teachers make very good use of computers and new technology.
- In some lessons teachers do not handle the misbehaviour of a minority of students well.

Commentary

83. Results in GCSE examinations in both English and English literature in 2002 were well above national averages, including those for similar schools, and amongst the best in the school. Students, especially boys, did better in literature than in language. In 2003 results in both subjects and for both boys and girls improved further. GCSE communication studies is a very popular option. Results in 2002 were above national average, students making more progress in the subject than in virtually all others. 2003 results showed a slight decline, but relative performance remained good.

84. Standards in the current Year 11 are well above average. Students are able to make their own detailed notes, plan work quickly but carefully, and willingly write at length. They appreciate the need to improve work, and drafting shows much evidence of refining expression rather than just correcting mistakes. Spelling remains a relative weakness.

85. Students join the school with above average standards overall and go on to achieve very well. Students learn how to use and develop a wide and accurate vocabulary, including a very good command of technical terms. Although some average attaining students have less developed essay styles, most students structure their work well, frequently showing very good insight into issues, particularly in media and literature. Most students are quick to see cues, significance and symbolism. The ability in almost all students to analyse ideas and present a response to them in articulate, flowing English is a strength. Their being in smaller classes, coupled with teachers' knowledge of their needs and good support, enables students with special needs to achieve very well. This is also true of gifted and talented students who benefit from being taught in sets, and from the demanding tasks and essay titles they are expected to tackle.

86. Teaching is very good. Lessons are very well planned. Students know what the purpose of a lesson is, how it will help improve their understanding, and what tasks they will be doing. This involves them fully in the process and most are mature and cooperative during lessons. A small minority, mainly average attaining boys, are inclined to make silly and sometimes offensive remarks. Some teachers lack clear and consistent strategies for dealing with those students. General relationships are, however, very positive such that teachers and students help each other in good-humoured and tolerant fashion. Learning has a strong focus to skills, which are defined, explained and then practiced by students. There is a very clear awareness of examination requirements, but both teachers and students avoid the pitfall of becoming obsessed with examinations to the detriment of wider knowledge and understanding. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, enabling them to make wider references and give expert individual advice. This is also apparent in their highly effective use of the computer suite within the department. An intranet enables students to check course requirements, what is assessed and how, set texts, and possible internet research

sites. Much coursework is word-processed, but students learn to go beyond using the computer as a means of making work look neater. Many learn considerable independence in researching and structuring their assignments.

87. A key strength of the English department is outstanding leadership, and the excellent way in which it is managed, with a clear, strong and shared philosophy about the best ways to teach, and the importance of sharing ideas and information. The department's work and performance are thoroughly reviewed; successes are celebrated and inadequacies are addressed. Students are aware and appreciative of what is expected of them and the high level of support they are given. Assessment is very good and allows weaknesses in individuals, classes or course aspects to be highlighted and improved. Accommodation and resources in the specialist English block are very good both in terms of amount and quality. An extensive and imaginative range of enrichment activities is available. An ambitious Arts Week project combines experiences in English, media, music, drama, dance and art, with specialist help from visiting experts. The initiative also links to community arts groups and local schools.

88. There has been very good progress since the previous inspection. Strengths have been further developed and issues addressed. Whilst there has clearly been improvement in boys' achievement and student attitudes, these remain areas for development.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

89. Overall provision is satisfactory because although there is very good practice in some areas, the school as a whole does not have a clear and shared literacy policy. Students join the school in Year 10 with good literacy skills. These are developed over the next two years, but too much has been left to the initiative of individual departments. There is an interim co-ordinator, but the action plan is limited in scope and developments are behind those normally found. Awareness of the National Strategy and those elements of it which most help student learning are too variable. Significantly in English and science, the two most successful subjects in the school, elements of the strategy are a feature of most lessons. In some lessons across the school, teachers' board work is untidy and contains errors which do not provide students with a good model of the need for accuracy.

90. Class discussion is an effective feature of many lessons. Technical vocabulary is well used and many students use speech to clarify and extend their ideas. Some answers, for instance in PE, can be too short or too casually expressed. In geography, history and ICT, students would benefit from more opportunities to discuss ideas. In too many lessons listening is expected but not insisted on, so that potentially valuable ideas are not heard by all.

91. Written work shows effort and care and its quality has been a major feature in the recent improvement in standards. Many subjects find imaginative ways of stimulating interest in writing and not allowing it to become a chore. In a science lesson, students enjoyed writing to Henry VIII trying to explain why, genetically, he bore some responsibility for his wives' failure to provide a male heir. In mathematics, teachers have taken action to try to improve boys' note-taking skills.

92. Reading and research skills are very good, and there is good teaching of how to extract key points, or factors pertinent to a particular question, from a text. The library has a satisfactory range of books and resources to support study but there are too few books for fiction and general pleasure reading.

Modern foreign languages

French and German

Provision in modern foreign languages is **good**.

The main focus was on French and German in Years 10 and 11. One lesson of Spanish after school was sampled; students are preparing for GCSE in their own time. They are committed and enthusiastic and have made a good start in the subject.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Subject knowledge and linguistic competence of the teachers are very good.
- The learning environment and resources are of high quality.
- A wide and appropriate curriculum enhances provision.
- Students have underdeveloped speaking skills.
- Very good leadership and good management are both evident.
- Very good use is made of ICT in some lessons.
- Some inconsistencies exist in teaching quality because of staff turnover.

Commentary

93. French GCSE results in 2003 were in line with the national average, Students attained higher results in listening, reading and writing than in speaking. Over recent years, GCSE results in French have been broadly in line with national average. The school however, enters most students for GCSE, whereas the national entry is below 60 per cent. This makes direct comparison with national statistics less reliable. Girls attained much higher standards than boys.

94. In German, results have been consistently well above average over the past five years. In 2003, they were again well above national expectations. Most students taking German are higher attainers and they generally achieve well over the three years leading to GCSE. Girls attained slightly higher results than boys.

95. Current standards observed reflect the recent GCSE results with standards in line with national average for French and well above national average for German. In a Year 10 French lesson, students displayed very high listening skills. They took part in a lesson conducted entirely in French by the native speaker teacher and coped well with a challenging recorded text. In Year 11, the coursework of one high attaining group was above average, with complex grammar and wide vocabulary. The coursework of another Year 11 group was below average and contained mainly simple phrases. Overall, in both languages, students make good progress and achieve well, including lower attaining students.

96. Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11 in both languages though more variable in French. In very good lessons, the teachers use French or German almost exclusively, resulting in the development of very good listening skills. Activities are well planned, well resourced and closely linked to the learning objectives. There is pace and challenge and, consequently, students are focused and enthusiastic. Good use is made of the classroom environment to support students' learning. In one very good NVQ French lesson, a group of low attaining boys was motivated to achieve well because of the active nature of the lesson, good use of ICT and good relationship with the teacher.

97. On the odd occasions where practice was unsatisfactory, teachers did not use enough French, the lesson objectives were unclear and students were not sufficiently supported which resulted in some off-task behaviour and underachievement.

98. Leadership is very good and management is good. The departmental documentation is very good and gives a clear insight into the way the department works. The department is particularly strong in using data to improve standards and achievement. Marking and assessment are often good. Some students benefit from a wide range of trips abroad and business links. There are good opportunities for students to follow vocational courses with a French element.

99. Standards have been satisfactorily sustained since the last inspection, even with languages being taken by all students.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The highest attaining students are well provided for with a double GCSE course, including statistics; however, the higher attainers in other classes are less well challenged.
- Teachers plan their lessons well and have a good knowledge and understanding in mathematics.
- A minority of students' loutish behaviour, lethargy and poor attitude, hinders good learning from taking place in some classes.
- Leadership of the department is very good. The head of department is a very good role model with a vision that is successfully moving the department forward.
- The discontinuity in staffing in recent years has not provided students with the stability they need to reach their potential.

Commentary

100. The GCSE results in 2003 were above national average standards and were average in comparison with schools of similar prior attainment. These results were higher than those in the last two years which have been in line with the national average for mathematics.

101. By the end of Year 11, standards are above the national average. Higher attaining students can handle data well and can use frequency density diagrams to display their data. The lower attainers can name the types of angles, though are unable to say what is special about an Isosceles triangle. Girls make similar achievement to boys.

102. Students on entry to Year 10 are above the national average in mathematics. They make appropriate progress during Years 10 and 11, evident in their increasing ability to use trigonometry effectively. At the end of Year 11, students reach above average standards reflecting satisfactory achievement. The unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes of a minority of students hinder efforts to enable most students to make good progress.

103. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory and some of the specialists, including the head of mathematics, demonstrate good practice. The teachers plan their lessons well, have a good understanding of mathematics and work hard to raise standards. The three-part lesson structure is used; however, the starts and finishes in most lessons are not as well used as they could be to engage student interest and recap learning. Teachers do usually share lesson objectives with the students and in the better lessons the tasks and time allocated are made clear. Where this happens, students understand the relevance of their learning and students make good progress. The highest attaining / gifted and talented students are fully stretched in the special fast track groups. They are therefore able to take both GCSE statistics and GCSE mathematics in the two years. The best teaching challenges all students, evident in a Year 11 lesson on trigonometry where students were asked to indicate what they had learnt. This checkpoint allowed the teacher to evaluate student progress and extend the work of the more able whilst giving support to the others. This good use of student self-evaluation is less evident in other, less challenging lessons. Progress Review forms are

used, whereby both teacher and student comment on the student's effort made in that module of work and set future targets. Teachers work to improve students' literacy skills, by insisting on the use of mathematical vocabulary. Homework is provided though not necessarily following the homework schedule and on occasion leads to inconsistent expectations of students. Good diagnostic marking is in evidence with indications to revisit and correct work where necessary though this is not consistent across all classes.

104. The head of department is a very good leader and role model. He is moving the department forward, in line with his vision. There is effective co-ordination and monitoring of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11, with a good faculty improvement plan for raising achievement. However, strategies to tackle the issue of misbehaviour by a minority are not yet fully effective. ICT is being used increasingly for teaching and learning though it is not fully embedded in schemes of work and current practice. Assessment and performance data are well used to identify, track and monitor the students' progress as well as substantiate their targets. This, together with other developing good practice, has been hampered by staffing problems. Extra-curricular activities are offered to raise achievement, including the regular maths puzzle in the school's newsletter and lunchtime enrichment sessions. The overall management of the subject is good though the improved procedures have yet to fully impact on the quality of provision.

105. Overall, improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Greater developments have been made recently since the present head of department was appointed.

Mathematics across the curriculum

106. Overall, students show good competency in using mathematics. This however, rests on the prior exposure of students in their feeder schools to the numeracy strategy. The role of the numeracy co-ordinator is not sufficiently developed, nor is there planning in place to embrace the strategy within the mathematics faculty or extend it across other subjects.

SCIENCE

Overall provision is **very good**.

Main Strengths and weaknesses

- Students' GCSE results are well above the national average.
- Very good assessment data enables teachers to track student performance so that underachievement can be identified and tackled.
- Very good leadership and management ensure a clear direction focused on raising attainment.
- Good teaching enables students to make good progress, though some inconsistencies in teaching need to be tackled.
- The behaviour of some students inhibits learning.

Commentary

107. Standards in GCSE examinations have risen over the last three years, dramatically so in 2003 when results were well above the national average. This rise was due to the decision to change syllabus and to structure coursework to improve the achievement of boys. The results of boys and girls are now similar.

108. Standards seen in lessons overall also suggest standards are well above average. Higher attaining students are working at higher grade levels. They can explain clearly how substitution reactions in organic chemistry work. They are able to note and explain unusual observations in their practical work. Gifted students were challenged by an exercise in drawing the display formulae of geometric isomers. Students in middle sets can connect the length of a hydrocarbon chain to the physical properties of the chemical whilst others can predict the physical properties of giant ionic structures. They are able to explain ideas orally and recall factual information and technical

vocabulary well. Lower achieving students enjoy practical work and can recall the names of parts of the body well. They are able to identify simple patterns in experimental results.

109. Achievement is good as students progress from above average on entry to well above average by the end of Year 11. A survey of written work showed that students have covered a good range of science topics. All students present their work well. Higher attaining students have developed very good literacy skills and good numeracy skills. These enable them to explain scientific ideas, debate points of view, write extended pieces of work, construct and interpret graphs and balance chemical equations. Middle achieving students also present their work well though have made less progress in their ability to explain scientific ideas. Lower achieving students use helpful sheets to record their work and keep their books in good order. There was clear evidence in their books that all students make good progress.

110. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan well structured lessons. In the best of these, relationships are supportive and encouraging so that students feel confident to express their ideas. Teachers plan exciting demonstrations to capture the interest of students. Activities are varied, setting a good pace to the lesson. Opportunities are provided for students to discuss their work so that they can express what they have understood. Teachers have high expectations of what students can do and manage time well so that they are enabled to fulfil these expectations. The setting arrangements enable teachers to provide well for the different needs of students. Higher sets provide suitable challenge for the gifted and talented and smaller sets enable lower attaining students to work very well. Students respond well to these lessons on the whole, but in some middle sets, teachers have to work very hard to keep students on track. Some students find it very difficult to respond to opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. They behave poorly and do not make as much progress as they might but, over time, they do progress because of the quality of the teaching and the persistence of the teacher. Teachers have access to a very good data base which allows them to track student performance and tackle any underachievement.

111. Where lessons are less good, they lack pace because planning has not been sharp enough. Lesson objectives do not take account of individual needs. Occasionally resources are misused and students are given unchallenging work. In such lessons, students become bored and achieve very little.

112. The leadership of the department is very good. There are excellent relationships between team members, with a drive for improvement at all levels through the evaluation that the department does of its work. However inconsistencies in teaching need to be identified and tackled in order to make the quality of learning more even. At a time of recruitment difficulties, the department has been very well managed to minimise the effect on achievement. The high quality documentation and schemes of work have helped the induction of new teachers into the department. All students study either combined double science or the new applied science course. The new scheme of work identifies cross curricular themes such as citizenship and ICT opportunities. ICT is well used by the department.

113. Technical support for the department is most efficient. Resources are very good, but accommodation is varied. Whilst the newly equipped laboratories are of good quality, other laboratories need refitting. The mobiles put extra demands on the technical team and many sixth form lessons are not in laboratories at all. The department works hard to make the current situation work so that it does not affect standards, but it creates extra strain on a hardworking team and constrains some of the developmental work.

114. Since the last inspection, GCSE results have improved and are now well above average. All students make good progress including those with special educational needs and gifted and talented students. The teaching is now good. Overall improvement has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Increased and improved accommodation and resources now exist.
- Good use is made of computers in other subjects of the curriculum.
- Unsatisfactory provision for the GCSE applied ICT course leads to unsatisfactory progress and below average standards.
- Some teaching of the GCSE course is unsatisfactory.
- Systematic monitoring and coordination of the use of ICT in other subject areas is lacking.

Commentary

115. Although standards improved in 2003, GCSE results were still well below average. Early entry of Year 10 students for the recently introduced applied ICT course resulted in a very small proportion of students achieving A* to C grades. Current work, in the GCSE applied ICT course indicates that standards are below average and too many students underachieve.

116. Students join the school with good levels of competence and confidence in using computers and by the end of Year 11 make appropriate progress when using computers in other subjects. However, their performance in the GCSE course is unsatisfactory. When engaged in practical computer work they demonstrate their skills effectively and use features of different computer programmes well. In the GCSE course, they use the internet for research and when sufficiently motivated can use a range of programmes to draft and present reports, for example about the way in which they and other people use computers for different purposes. However, current GCSE course work indicates that the lack of variety and challenge of the work does not fully engage student interest and many are underachieving.

117. Students learn to use computers in most of their other subjects and this gives them the opportunity to apply a range of computer skills effectively. In the main computers are used well for research and the presentation of coursework but they are also used very effectively in some other subjects to enhance subject content. For example, in English computers are used to develop thinking skills. In design technology they are used to record the results of surveys in graphical form and enhance presentation of coursework. In science they are used to record experimental data. Students with special educational needs often make good progress because they feel supported in their learning when using computers. The more able students and committed computer users also achieve well.

118. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall but some teaching is unsatisfactory. In the better lessons, teaching and learning opportunities are well structured, teachers use a good range of teaching methods and the teachers' expertise is used effectively in the delivery of whole class instruction and individual student support. Teachers have suitably high expectations of behaviour and performance and time is used well. However, in a minority of lessons, the effectiveness of teaching methods is restricted because the encouragement and engagement of students is limited, student management and expectations of behaviour are weak and respectful working relationships have not yet been established. When engaged in practical work most students show satisfactory levels of concentration and commitment to their work. Marking and assessment procedures are satisfactory but could be more effective in enabling students to improve their work. Homework is not always used effectively to support class work.

119. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The development of accommodation and resources and the promotion of the subject have been good. The number of computers is above the national average but the provision of equipment for measurement and control, including computer-aided design and manufacture, is underdeveloped. In spite of the significant efforts being

made by teachers to structure a viable programme of work, curriculum time is too limited and this is affecting the achievement of students taking the current GCSE course. Some good computer-based work takes place in other subjects, though there is insufficient coordination, monitoring and support for the use of ICT in other subjects.

120. Although there have been significant improvements in resources and the use of computers in other subjects, standards and achievement in the examination course are below expectation and improvement since the last inspection is therefore unsatisfactory.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

121. Students join the school with good levels of competence and confidence in the use of computers. They have good opportunities to use computers in most subjects of the curriculum, both to support their learning and to improve the presentation of their work. Students are good at applying their computer skills. They access and use a range of features of a number of computer programmes confidently and are quick to transfer these skills to the work being carried out in other subjects. The use of computers in English is particularly strong. The use in other subjects is also good with opportunities to handle data, communicate ideas, develop graphical work, carry out research and then apply the information gained to develop well-presented work. Very good access to computer resources is enabling students to apply their computer skills in a variety of contexts. Achievement through the application of computers in other subjects is good.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results improved in 2003.
- Students build upon their geographical knowledge, understanding and skills in a balanced way.
- Some tasks set by teachers are unimaginative and do not always fully challenge the highest attainers.
- The pace of working is not always sufficiently managed and teachers often accept a leisurely approach by students.
- There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to share good practice.
- The subject is beginning to provide good opportunities for students to use computers.

Commentary

122. GCSE results were in line with national average in 2003 representing an improvement over the previous year. This was mainly because of a better performance by boys whose standards improved to be closer to that of the girls.

123. The standards of current Year 11 students are in line with the national average. Although the standards of girls are slightly higher, the difference is no greater than in most schools. Students know the characteristics of geographical processes, such as those that create the weather conditions in Europe. They understand why they differ at various times of the year and can interpret graphical data to draw their conclusions.

124. Students start Year 10 with generally average standards. They achieve satisfactorily during the GCSE course, by progressing at a rate that maintains their work at expected levels. Teachers often provide tasks that appropriately integrate knowledge, understanding and skills, so students build these in a balanced way. This was seen in work in which students used what they know about the causes of flooding, understanding of how floods affect people and skills in interpreting maps,

when learning about the 1952 Lynmouth flood. There is no significant variation in the progress of boys and girls, or between students with middle and lower attainment. Teachers make appropriate reference to the individual targets of those with special needs, to provide suitable tasks and support. Although higher attainers also achieve satisfactorily, the lack of more challenging extension activities specifically for them restricts their opportunities to make good progress.

125. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with about a quarter of lessons being good. However, in many lessons, teaching provides only limited opportunities for students to achieve well. This occurs when students are given insufficient opportunity to make use of what they have learned earlier, including in their middle schools. Written tasks are often sound, but unimaginative, for example when students take notes from textbooks. Often teachers allow students to work at their own pace, accepting that, for some, this is rather leisurely. In question and answer sessions, teachers do not always direct questions to ensure that all are participating, or ensure that all are listening to benefit from verbal explanations and instructions. In the best lessons, teaching is brisk and enthusiastic, so that learning is quickly under way and students' interest is maintained. Clearly stated objectives give students a firm indication of what they have to achieve and good links with previous learning provide a solid foundation for moving forward. Good questioning ensures that all students have to listen, think and respond.

126. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Geography is managed within a humanities faculty. In the fairly limited time since the current arrangements have been in place, there has been a conscientious focus on creating structures to move the faculty forward. These improvements in humanities are beginning to impact on geography provision though there is still some way to go in using assessment information, monitoring and evaluating teaching to share good practice and contributing to citizenship and literacy. However, the department is developing good links with feeder schools in order to improve continuity of learning and geography is beginning to provide good opportunities for students to use computers to undertake research and present their work.

127. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The monitoring of student progress is beginning to improve and there has been a recent rise in examination results. A significant improvement in the provision of well qualified staff has overcome earlier instability, so that the longer term outlook for the subject is now better. However, there has been insufficient improvement in managing the casual attitudes to work of some students.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory** with good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Learning is well managed, including the conduct of lessons and preparation for external examination at GCSE.
- Student achievement is well monitored, but some boys underachieve when not sufficiently challenged in lessons.
- The curriculum is good, giving those students who choose history a knowledge and understanding of modern Britain, Europe and the USA.
- Gifted and talented students generally achieve well at GCSE but are not given access to extra material in lessons to stimulate interest.

Commentary

128. Recent GCSE results were just above national average though there was considerable gender difference with girls achieving well above and boys in line with national averages. However, the gap between boys and girls is narrowing over time. The subject is significantly reducing in numbers, as a result of changes to entitlement. 2003 results reflected half of all students taking history, but only a sixth of all students in Year 10 and 11 currently take the subject to GCSE level.

129. Standards in Year 11 are above national averages. Students question sources on the USA between the wars, and the majority can evaluate and compare sources well. They have done their own research using the internet and can compare different views of the results of Prohibition and assess the emotional involvement of key politicians, such as Roosevelt. Standards in Year 10 are also above the national average. Boys and girls show awareness of the different motives of the Big Three at the peace conference at Versailles and the conflict of interests between Lloyd George's economic concerns and his awareness of the need to appeal to voters who blamed Germany for the war. They write succinctly about these ideas.

130. Level of attainment on entry is above national expectations, and students make satisfactory progress in factual understanding, and good progress in questioning historical sources. Many are able to make comparisons and apply concepts from what they have studied. For example, Year 11 students compared the failure of Prohibition in 1920s USA to the problems of drugs control in 21st century Britain. Appropriate support for students with special educational needs helps them to achieve well, whereas gifted and talented students lack extra stimulus to foster interest in historical thinking. Common assessments give students indications of general progress, but they need targets based on separate historical skills to raise their own standards of work.

131. Teaching is satisfactory, and in half of lessons seen the structured learning strategy enhanced the learning for all students significantly. All lessons are well managed with good student behaviour and cooperative attitudes predominating. Where a few students, usually boys, fail to comply with high expectations, or lessons lack pace, learning can be adversely affected. In most lessons seen group work leads to further understanding of complex issues, such as the problems of nationalism in Europe after the First World War, and the expectations that the victorious Allies would be able to make gains to cover financial and material losses suffered.

132. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The recently appointed head of humanities is working to improve teaching though these efforts are currently constrained by a lack of opportunities to observe and share good practice. The lack of a second room for teaching history limits access to resources and the development of a specialist environment. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory, reflected in a better curriculum and improved assessment. Use of ICT is patchy.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been a steady rise in standards.
- Students are confident in expressing views with reasons.
- The good attitudes of the students contribute to the good achievement.
- Data is not analysed to identify and focus on areas of improvement.
- The use of constructive comments on marked work is variable.

Commentary

133. The short GCSE course has only been running for two years. All students take the course and the results are improving. In 2003 just over a half of the students obtained grades A* to C which is in line with the national average. This was a significant improvement over 2002 when a third obtained grades A* to C and results were well below the national average.

134. Work seen in books and lessons shows evidence of this continuing rising level with the work being above the national average. The students are particularly strong in giving their views on issues and supporting their views with reasoned arguments.

135. Achievement is good. Students join the school with knowledge; skills and understanding that are broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education that the school uses. The knowledge and skills vary according to the school from which they come.

136. Teaching is good with some very good aspects. The best teaching is challenging, has good pace and a vitality that stimulates the students' interest. The lessons encourage students to express their views, give reasons for their answers, apply their knowledge and give examples to show their understanding of issues. There is an emphasis on the literacy skills of the students in extending their vocabulary and in general support. In the best lessons, support materials are available for students with weaker literacy skills. Attitudes of the students to religious education are good. Good teacher-student relationships ensure that all students are included and feel confident in expressing personal views. This contributes to the students making good progress. In all years the marking of the students' books gives positive encouragement but the use of constructive comments to enable students to have a sharp focus on what is needed to raise their attainment level is variable: and a number of comments are not followed up. In a number of lessons discussion is teacher led and this limits the amount of student contribution. The teaching of the subject in a number of rooms inhibits teaching and learning in that there is a lack of subject-based display work for use in the lessons as exemplar or for factual information sources.

137. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The department has moved forward since the last inspection in the implementation of the GCSE course for all and there is a clear vision for continual improvement. New and non-specialist staff are well supported. Data is analysed in terms of general student performance but is not analysed to identify areas of specific weakness to target improvement. Speakers sharing different faiths enhance the curriculum but visits to places of worship have not been arranged for all students. ICT is still developing.

138. Improvement since the last inspection is good. All the positive aspects have been maintained, attitudes have improved, standards are rising and assessment is now good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students attain above average standards and achievement is good because teaching is good.
- Effective teamwork enables teachers to use their very good expertise well and as a result, good programmes of work are being planned and delivered.
- Standards are very high in food and textiles technology but results are below average in resistant materials and electronics options.
- Good assessment procedures enable students to improve their work.
- Lack of clarity in setting out how opportunities for literacy, numeracy, ICT and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are delivered in programmes of work.
- Some aspects of accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory and health and safety risk assessments are not as rigorous as they should be.

Commentary

139. In 2003, overall GCSE results improved to be above average for both A* to C and A* to G grades. The results for food and textiles technology were well above average and the proportion of students attaining A* and A grades in these subjects was well above average. Girls' attainment is above the average for girls whilst boys' attainment is slightly below the average for boys.

140. Students of all ability levels are developing their knowledge and understanding of materials and their use. They understand the design process and, in their coursework, use good research and analytical skills to produce a good selection of design ideas. These are then developed into individual, and sometimes creative, final solutions. Recording and presentation skills are good, and the work of higher attaining students is often very good. Effective use is made of computer technology in presenting some coursework but there is insufficient use of computer technology in designing and manufacturing products. Students of all ability levels enjoy practical work. They develop confidence and competence in using a range of materials and processes. All students, including those who have special educational needs make progress throughout Years 10 and 11. Achievement is good overall because work is well structured and this enables students to address examination requirements well.

141. Students have the benefit of very knowledgeable teachers. Coursework is well structured and well planned because teachers have good subject expertise and are very well informed about examination requirements. Students are compliant and cooperative and show interest in the tasks set. Most show good levels of concentration, particularly when involved in practical work. Many spend a lot of time in presenting their coursework to a high standard and homework is used well to reinforce learning. Teachers have suitably high expectations of students' behaviour and work. They make good use of time even though relatively short lesson time places constraints on practical work, particularly in food technology. Marking and assessment are good and enable students to review and improve their work.

142. A senior manager is currently providing oversight of the subject until the arrival of a new subject leader. Despite this, the subject is well managed because of the close co-operation between members of the design technology team. This has enabled the department to provide a well-balanced curriculum and improve standards. Departmental documentation is satisfactory but does not show clearly how the subject contributes to the development of students' literacy, numeracy, ICT skills and aspects of their spiritual, moral and cultural education awareness. The improvement in food technology accommodation is good though the working environment and resources in other areas are barely satisfactory and do not reflect the school's technology college status.

143. Overall, improvement since the last inspection is good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have a good command of their subject, and students achieve well.
- Planned learning experiences are wide and varied.
- Good use is made of assessment and monitoring.
- GCSE results in graphics are low.
- ICT facilities are dated.
- Single lessons restrict what can be achieved in some areas of the art curriculum.

Commentary

144. Results in GCSE art examinations in 2002 were well below average. There were fewer higher grades, and boys and girls achieved less well in art than in their other subjects. In 2003, overall there was some improvement, but results were still below average. Boys, however, achieved much better results than girls, and were in line with the national average. Results in GCSE graphics examinations in 2003 were well below the national average. Girls achieved better than boys.

145. Students enter the school in Year 10 having had a variety of experiences in art and in the range of materials used. In lessons and work seen standards on entry are below expected levels overall reflecting varied prior experience. Students in Year 10 make progress and achieve well such that, by Year 11, standards of work observed are about average compared to the national picture. This represents an improvement in standards compared with previous years.

146. From their differing starting points, students are achieving well because they are learning new skills and use a variety of different materials. In discussions, students showed understanding of their own work and that of other artists. In a Year 10 graphics lesson, based on 'movement', students studying the work of futurist artists, and were able to make connections between that and their own work. Students were able to discuss fluently the work of surrealist artist Max Ernst, and the technique of *frottage*.

147. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teachers demonstrate a good command of their subject. This is characterised by their knowledge of the GCSE course enabling students to learn well. Planning of courses is effective, clear learning objectives are set in lessons, and teachers assess students' work thoroughly and constructively. Students understand how well they are doing, and how they can improve. In Year 10, students are given a good grounding in the basic elements of art, as seen in a lesson based on colour theory. Students observed in a Year 10 graphics class had successfully completed a bridging task that was started in Year 9 at their previous school. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. In one lesson observed, students were supported by a teaching assistant who was fully aware of the lesson's learning objectives. In Year 11, students are able to work independently, exploring and developing ideas for their mock exam. Mostly, students worked productively, showing good application and engagement.

148. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The team of teachers offers a wide range of skills and experience, enabling a vibrant working atmosphere. Within the art department itself, meetings are not formally scheduled, but staff meet on an ad hoc basis. The departmental development plan does not function effectively as a strategy to engender change and move the department forward. Good systems are in place to analyse performance, set targets for students and assess their work. The current curriculum is heavily biased towards the weaker area of graphics, with a greater number of students opting for this subject. Students may not be fully aware, when choosing their options, of the intellectual and practical demands of this course. Displays around the school reflect the variety of art activities that take place.

149. Since the last inspection, the proportion of staff with specialist subject knowledge has improved, although a small minority of lessons are still taught by non-specialists. Time allocated to the subject has improved slightly, but the single periods are restrictive for some areas, and this affects the depth to which students can develop their work at one time. This represents just about satisfactory progress.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The achievement of students is good.
- Students are taught well and given very good feedback on their work.
- The department offers good opportunities for students to extend their music making outside of lesson times.
- There is not enough classroom space to cope with the increasing numbers of students choosing to study the subject.

Commentary

150. Students enter the school with standards which are above average. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average. GCSE results are above average and steadily improving. Music is chosen by a smaller and often dedicated minority though the GCSE has increased its popularity more recently.

151. The achievement of students is good. They perform confidently and musically with attention to such details as phrasing and dynamics. They compose and arrange music in groups and individually, in styles which are well matched to their musical interests. Good use is made of computers to help them to compose. They appraise and evaluate their own work effectively. Students' workbooks show that the prescribed areas of learning are being covered in sufficient depth to prepare them fully for the GCSE examination.

152. Teaching and learning are good. Tasks are well matched to students' learning needs, and well presented handouts help them to succeed in the activities they undertake. Teachers draw effectively on the work of other students to provide very clear exemplification of what is to be achieved and this both motivates them, and helps them to learn. In a Year 10 lesson, the skills of drum players in the class were effectively used to teach the class how to compose a drum part. Teachers provide very helpful feedback to students on their work so that they are clear about what they have achieved, and what they need to do to improve. The fifty minute lesson limits what can be learned in a session, particularly when the start of the lesson is delayed by late arrivals. The cramped accommodation means that concentration is sometimes difficult because of the sound generated by others working nearby.

153. Leadership and management are very good. Restrictions imposed by the cramped accommodation are well managed. Excellent use is made of a technician in the classroom to ensure that lessons run smoothly and that equipment is working. There are very good systems in place for monitoring the progress of students. Instrumental teachers are given good support to enable them to teach effectively.

154. Students are offered a balanced range of opportunities to extend their musical learning outside the classroom. Activities are ably led by departmental staff and instrumental teachers. Staff have very good relationships with students and this encourages them to use the department out of lesson times to practice, and to make music informally.

155. Improvement since the time of the previous inspection has been good. The number of students studying music is increasing, and the subject is equally popular amongst boys and girls. The department now has a good range of technological resources to support students' learning. However, because the numbers have increased, the accommodation is now not adequate to cope with the demands made upon it.

Drama

Fewer boys choose GCSE drama as an option than is normally the case. GCSE results in drama were **well above national average** in 2002 and were sustained in 2003. There has been a narrowing of the performance gap between boys and girls. In 2003' girls made more progress in drama than in virtually all other GCSE subjects. Current standards are well above average. Students learn the conventions of drama and show very good independence and initiative in groups. Performance is confident and often shows sensitivity.

Teaching is **very good**, giving freedom and responsibility within clear guidelines. Relationships are excellent. Leadership and management are very good, exuding commitment and enthusiasm. Accommodation is satisfactory. There are specialist areas, with blackout and some lighting facilities, but the rooms are not always appropriate and most are in need of updating.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good overall and, consequently, students make good progress, acquire new skills and achieve well.
- GCSE results are well above national averages.
- Leadership and management are good with some very good features.
- Extra-curricular activities provide students with very good opportunities to participate in sport, though time allocated for core lessons is rather restricting.
- In a minority of lessons tasks are insufficiently challenging and so standards are low.
- Attitudes and behaviour are good overall but, in some lessons, boys display silly attitudes and lack enthusiasm.

Commentary

156. The percentage of students who achieved an A*-C grade in the 2003 examinations was well above the national average. However, the percentage achieving higher grades is below average. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

157. Standards in GCSE lessons are above average but, in all lessons in Years 10 and 11, are average overall. This represents very good achievement in GCSE and good achievement in core activities as standards on entry are below average. Progress made by students with special educational needs is good and in line with that of other students. In theory lessons, students have good knowledge of somatotypes and can identify sporting links with body types. Analysis of work folders shows that higher attaining students have very good knowledge of anatomical vocabulary and circulatory and respiratory systems. They make good use of ICT to complete their personal exercise plans. GCSE practical standards are above average. For example, in a Year 11 trampoline lesson, higher attaining students show good control and quality when linking difficult skills. They show excellent attitudes and can evaluate the performance of others and suggest ways to improve. However, in core Year 11 basketball lessons, skills are below average, even in isolation. Standards of shooting and knowledge of tactics and positional play are limited and progress of half of the students is restricted by silly attitudes and a lack of real enthusiasm.

158. Students learn well because of good, often very good, teaching and lessons that are well planned with clear objectives and good progressions. Lessons often start with a recap of previous learning to aid continuity. Teachers have very good subject knowledge which ensures that students acquire new skills and apply them in appropriate games. Relationships are very good and, as a result, students behave well in most lessons and show a willingness to learn. When students are challenged they can develop their own drills and show good knowledge when coaching or analysing the performance of others. However, in a minority of lessons especially those for lower attaining students, there is insufficient challenge and students are offered limited opportunity to lead or plan activities.

159. Leadership and management of the department are good with some very good features. There is a clear vision to raise standards and to improve assessment, the role of non-participants and the breadth of activities in Years 10 and 11. Documentation is of a very high standard, although the scheme of work needs further development. Systems to monitor progress are good and developing. Staff have very good relationships, work well together and are committed to providing a very good range of extra-curricular activities. These enable many students to participate in clubs using the good facilities and resources. Talented students participate in a wide range of team fixtures. The time allocation for core lessons is insufficient to cover the National Curriculum in depth.

160. The department has maintained many of the good features of the last inspection report and, as a result, improvement is good.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement at GCSE is consistently above average and rising.
- Planning and teamwork by specialist teachers is good.
- Good use is made of real world situations.
- Limited numbers of girls take the subject, and they participate less in lessons.
- Low level of commitment is shown by some boys.
- Accommodation and displays provide a good environment for lessons.

Commentary

161. Students follow a GCSE course which includes business structure and behaviour, with consideration of the external environment and of people in organisations. Recent results have been above the national averages in the subject, and there has been a sustained upward trend. The attainment of the significantly greater number of boys on the course has been above that of the girls.

162. Standards in the current Year 11 are above national average and the levels of achievement are good, including those students with special educational needs. The willingness of students to raise and to respond to questions throughout lessons helps them to identify causes and effects and to further analyse information and data. This was seen in Year 11 classes on profit and loss accounts. A majority of students in all groups are boys, and this has consequences for the participation of girls during lessons.

163. The quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was good overall with strong features contributing to some teaching which is very effective. Specialist teachers are very knowledgeable about their subject and committed to developing the interests and enthusiasm of their classes. Support for individual students is notable, including the monitoring of progress and clarifying any difficulties. Learning objectives are emphasised, as are examination techniques. Lessons are arranged to ensure a good momentum and to provide variety in learning activities, such as in work on finance and marketing strategies. Marking and teacher assessment are encouraging and with useful feedback. Self-assessment is also an established practice that involves students in recognising their progress. Written work is well supported by an extensive range of information and work sheets.

164. Most students are attentive and cooperative, with the exception of a number of boys who do not show the commitment expected. The subject makes effective use of ICT, though access is limited on occasions. A local assignment provides a good opportunity to examine business situations and decisions and though realistic contexts are used to sustain student interest, outside visits are few.

165. The subject is well led and managed, with detailed schemes of work and documentation. Close teamwork is ensuring attention to course requirements and to the development and sharing of good resources and practice. Progress continues to be made on the provision for more and less able students. Improvement from the last inspection has been good, including the management of the subject and the learning objectives and strategies adopted.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The school provides a good modular PSHE programme that incorporates citizenship. It is delivered by a range of staff often operating on a carousel basis which has the benefit of enabling teachers to prepare and deliver units of work within their own areas of competence and confidence.

Observations by most of the inspection team found the teaching to be good overall in which the main strengths were the well planned activities that engaged the students' interests and the opportunities for students to be actively involved in the lesson through discussion and group activities.

The programme covers all the required elements including drug, sex and personal relationships education as well as opportunities for relevant careers education and guidance.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The team is well led.
- Good teaching leads to effective learning.
- An effective audit has identified contributions across the curriculum.
- Student self-assessment and feedback at the end of modules are positive and useful, but assessment of students' progress overall is as yet underdeveloped.
- Some good, relevant work is being done in most subjects which is not yet clearly and explicitly presented to students as citizenship.

Commentary

166. In the final plenary lesson of an election module, the quality of understanding shown, knowledge gained and oral contributions were above average. Students in sex education showed maturity in engaging with sensitive issues of sexual orientation in discussion without giving offence or becoming confrontational. In religious education, students showed a very good grasp of the role of the United Nations, could apply the criteria for a just war and express well-reasoned arguments to support their views on the Gulf War.

167. All groups of students achieve well. The self-assessment sheets completed at the end of each module demonstrate that they feel better informed and clearer about the issues. A lesson on financial literacy was characterised by liveliness and enthusiasm and well-articulated strong views. Students in a global citizenship lesson were very knowledgeable about current affairs. After a mock election, students entered into an informed and lively exchange of views on the importance of voting and good government. Good enquiry skills were evident in work on the impact of information technology in the lives of people with special needs and disabilities.

168. Good planning by teachers, clearly explained objectives, good probing questioning, with varied activities in lessons, stimulate students and lead to good learning. Video clips in media and financial literacy, spider diagram manipulation in political literacy, outside speakers and group work, all complement good didactic teaching. Very good PowerPoint presentations engage attention to the euro debate and the just war work. Students respond well to work experience and the Millie Dowler personal safety campaign. The school council and school charity work encourage active citizenship.

169. The current co-ordinator, in post for one year, has with the support of his team and senior staff, made major progress and improvements. Through hard work, enthusiasm and development of the current modular schemes of work, the citizenship course offers well-taught, good coverage of the syllabus to all students. An audit has identified all potential contributions from across the curriculum. Though embryonic in terms of staff citizenship consciousness the students are nonetheless engaging in contributory work. Student self-assessment gives useful feedback to the tutors.

170. Assessment of the work of students in citizenship, both in the discrete modular course and in contributory work through the whole curriculum is improving but, as yet, underdeveloped. Teachers in general have not yet consciously focused on the best use of obvious opportunities to support citizenship through the whole curriculum, including more extended written work. Relatively little written evidence to support judgements at the end of Y11 is currently generated by the discrete teaching. The co-ordinator is well aware of these deficiencies and has already shown the necessary vision, organisational skills, determination and support to tackle these issues.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003. (England figures, where available, are provisional)

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	No. entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art & Des – Fine Art	8	62.50	87.37	25.00	38.06	26.25	36.68
Biology	29	75.86	79.50	20.69	30.22	26.90	31.42
Chemistry	22	86.36	84.03	31.82	36.53	35.45	34.80
Dance	5	100.00		40.00		44.00	
Design & Technology	11	100.00	86.02	36.36	29.32	41.82	33.51
Economics	35	80.00	85.17	20.00	26.53	28.86	32.31
Electronics	10	80.00		20.00		29.00	
English Language & Literature	36	94.44	93.41	22.22	32.64	33.61	37.09
English Literature	60	96.67	93.41	20.00	32.64	35.50	37.09
Environmental Science	11	81.82	82.35	45.45	29.09	37.27	32.34
French	16	81.25	88.42	25.00	39.65	30.63	37.19
Further Mathematics	1	100.00		100.00		60.00	
General Studies	8	100.00	77.05	25.00	22.79	30.00	28.62
Geography	24	79.17	89.02	20.83	38.16	27.50	36.97
German	5	80.00	89.13	40.00	38.20	36.00	37.11
History	25	84.00	91.47	12.00	37.75	26.00	37.79
ICT	18	44.44	75.04	11.11	13.10	13.89	25.06
Mathematics	47	63.83	76.73	19.15	35.97	24.89	32.56
Media Studies	57	98.25	92.78	33.33	33.39	40.70	37.27
Music	3	100.00	89.42	33.33	35.22	36.67	36.48
Music Technology	8	100.00		37.50		38.75	
Art & Design Photography	14	78.57	87.37	35.71	38.06	30.71	36.68
Physical Education	31	83.87	86.04	6.45	26.26	25.16	32.39
Physics	28	67.86	82.17	17.86	36.32	22.86	34.17
Psychology	59	84.75	80.70	42.37	28.77	36.95	31.59
Religious Studies	10	100.00	90.24	70.00	40.61	52.00	38.31

Sociology	35	94.29	82.45	48.57	31.69	42.86	33.02
Subject	No. entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
Textiles	9	100.00	87.37	33.33	38.06	37.78	36.68
Theatre Studies	18	100.00		27.78		40.00	

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	No. entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art & Design Fine Art	10	100.00	96.64	30.00	50.06	80.00	86.39
Art & Design VCE	6	100.00	84.05	16.67	20.77	70.00	60.65
Biology	21	100.00	93.79	28.57	42.32	76.19	78.88
Business VCE	4	100.00	79.31	0.00	16.38	60.00	54.13
Chemistry	13	84.62	95.98	23.08	53.26	67.69	86.58
Design & Technology	11	100.00	96.28	63.64	36.50	94.55	77.98
Economics	20	95.00	97.11	25.00	36.29	67.00	78.70
Electronics	2	100.00		100.00		120.00	
English Language & Literature	14	92.86	98.57	7.14	43.75	64.29	84.53
English Literature	35	97.14	98.57	42.86	43.75	84.57	84.53
Environmental Science	7	100.00	94.62	14.29	39.01	71.43	77.95
French	8	100.00	97.89	12.50	57.37	70.00	90.53
Further Mathematics	2	100.00		100.00		120.00	
General Studies	86	93.02	91.89	37.21	29.76	75.81	70.65
Geography	31	93.55	98.09	32.26	48.86	74.19	86.14
German	2	100.00	97.50	50.00	54.51	100.00	88.76
Health & Social Care	7	100.00	85.34	14.29	17.17	65.71	58.78
History	14	100.00	97.99	28.57	48.88	70.00	86.23
ICT	9	100.00	91.71	11.11	20.78	55.56	65.22
Leisure & Recreation VCE	3	100.00	80.82	0.00	11.74	46.67	52.61
Mathematics	20	95.00	95.48	65.00	59.42	95.00	90.50
Media Studies	24	95.83	98.21	66.67	35.88	93.33	80.29
Music	1	100.00	96.70	0.00	43.22	80.00	82.58
Music Technology	4	100.00		0.00		60.00	
Art & Design Photography	8	100.00	96.64	50.00	50.06	90.00	86.39
Physical Education	10	100.00	95.46	50.00	31.67	84.00	74.33

Physics	12	91.67	94.66	58.33	48.30	90.00	82.91
Psychology	25	92.00	95.19	36.00	40.21	74.40	79.06
Religious Studies	6	100.00	98.04	0.00	52.31	73.33	88.16
Subject	No. entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
Science VCE	5	80.00	73.95	0.00	4.64	44.00	43.40
Sociology	22	86.36	95.84	45.45	44.39	76.36	81.99
Theatre Studies	7	100.00		14.29		65.71	
Travel & Tourism	8	87.50	81.76	12.50	13.27	62.50	54.64

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ Intermediate Business	13	84.61		15.38		0.00	
GNVQ Intermediate Leisure & Tour	20	65.00		5.00		0.00	

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and standards in English Literature are above the national average.
- There is very good teaching and learning as a result of well planned sessions by enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers.
- Students have a sound grasp of their texts and most can make sustained and informed responses.
- A minority of students are not actively involved in learning.

Commentary

171. Results in English language and literature have been in line with national average with all students being successful. Male students' results are not always as good as that of girls. The highest grades are gained in A level English literature where standards are above national average.

172. The standard of work of current students is above national average. In lessons observed in Year 12, students are doing well because of the carefully structured classes with a wide range of activities. They are able to analyse characters' use of language and development of character in plays such as 'Twelfth Night' and to articulate their views with some confidence. In written work there is clear development from the early analysis of individual scenes to more developed, sustained and evaluative comments on Shakespeare's techniques. Students are able to identify and assess the ways in which writers communicate their values to the audience on topics such as the political power of women in 'Richard III'. In work observed in Year 13 students in group work show detailed knowledge of contemporary fiction and are able to respond effectively, although there is some reluctance to contribute to whole class discussion.

173. Overall, students achieve well in relation to their standards on entry, largely because of the well planned teaching and learning.

174. Teaching overall is very good. It is very well planned by experienced teachers, pacy and varied. As well as study of literature, students enjoy language activities such as “Grammar Grabs”. Teachers are very enthusiastic and support students in a secure environment so that they are able to make incisive comments and effective challenges to the views of others. As a result of the established work ethic, students work diligently, particularly in groups where activities are differentiated by theme. In a few classes that are mainly teacher led student contributions are more limited. Courses are enriched by a range of extra activities such as extension sessions for the most able, an arts week and a residential trip to World War I battle sites. The department has developed very good resources for independent study.

175. Leadership and management of the department are good. The current head of department has made significant improvements since the last inspection. There is now a good peer observation system, homework is effectively monitored, there is a comprehensive faculty handbook and policies are established. However, there is still scope for more rigorous monitoring of achievement and schemes of work are not yet fully developed.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

176. Students come to the sixth form with above average language and literacy skills and use these effectively in their different courses. The majority of subjects and courses provide good opportunities for students to further improve their oral skills including discussion and group work. The vocational courses, including the advanced vocational (AVCE), make more conscious and planned efforts to develop communication skills. Writing skills through coursework and essays provide further development opportunities and the good and increasing use of ICT for presentations strengthen those skills further.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have very good listening and reading skills.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and linguistic skills.
- Students are less competent in speaking French.
- Very good teacher-student relationships exist.
- Very good use is made of ICT.

Commentary

177. Results in French A level over recent years have usually been at least in line with national average. Most students taking French are girls. Currently there is no A level German course though it is anticipated that the current GCSE strength will change this. Students achieve well in French and most AS students stay the course to be successful at A level.

178. In lessons, listening and reading skills are very well-developed. In Year 12 and Year 13, students coped well with lessons being conducted in French and read challenging texts on complex topics. The amount of French spoken by the students themselves was fairly limited. Their oral contributions were generally short and they rarely used the language spontaneously. Writing is generally in line with national expectations: students produce coursework containing a range of complex structures and appropriate vocabulary on a wide variety of A level topics.

179. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and linguistic skills and this challenges students to raise their standards. The focus on oral skills is less pronounced. Very good use is made of information communication technology to enhance the presentation and practice of language. Relationships between students and with the teachers are very good. Students are committed and have a good attitude to their work.

180. The leadership and management of French are very good. There is very good teamwork between the teachers and the schemes of work and departmental documentation are very comprehensive. The foreign language assistant is well deployed and supported and makes a good contribution to students' learning. Formative assessment is very effective in helping students improve the quality of their work.

181. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The knowledge and understanding of the teachers is good, which supports students' learning well.
- Gifted and talented students are challenged to achieve their potential.
- Students are encouraged to participate in discussions, responding well to questions and volunteering suggestions in articulate ways.
- Students find the transition between GCSE and AS level difficult to make, so that learning suffers.

Commentary

182. In 2003, the results at A level were above average in comparison with national standards. These were similar to those in attained in 2002.

183. By the end of Year 13, standards are above the national average. In Year 12 at AS level, students are developing their skills in calculus and can differentiate at a basic level. In Year 13, students choose coursework topics such as numerical solutions to equations and can use decimal search, Newton Raphson and fixed point estimation in their investigations.

184. Overall most students are achieving well. They steadily acquire a new knowledge and skills. Students with lower GCSE attainment have greater difficulty in grasping some of the new theory and a number do not continue beyond AS level. The progress and achievement of male and female students is similarly good.

185. Overall teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a good knowledge of mathematics and support students well with clear explanations. Students freely participate in discussions, they respond well to questions and volunteer suggestions articulately. The lessons proceed at a brisk pace, are planned well and allow students to build on each stage of new learning before progressing to the next. Students have a good understanding of mathematics and make effective use of past work when introduced to a new topic. Homework is set regularly; it is used effectively to consolidate and extend new work introduced in the lesson. Gifted and talented students receive further mathematics in Years 12 and 13. They can access on-line support from one university and mentoring from post-graduate students at another. Enrichment also takes place via distance learning. However, students have too few opportunities to develop their independent study skills through research and preparing for topics in advance of their lessons. The notes taken in class and homework produced by some students in Year 12 sometimes lack structure and do not always form a useful resource for future revision and learning. The marking of students' work contains good diagnostic comments that show the students where they have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve.

186. The head of department provides very good leadership and manages the department well. Teachers work well together to raise standards and provide extra curricular activities for the students, such as lunchtime mathematics sessions. In discussion with the students, it became clear that making the transition between GCSE and AS level was something some found difficult. A consequence is that some students discontinue their mathematics and indicates a need to look at realistic course entry standards and learning strategies that address the needs of students with less developed mathematical skills. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory, but greater developments have been made since the appointment of the present head of department.

Mathematics across the curriculum

187. Standards of mathematics are above average and some use is made of mathematics across the curriculum, though the management of this lacks coherence. In post 16 science, there is good use of numeracy in data collection, presentation and interpretation of graphs. Students use calculators competently and can transpose formulae with ease.

SCIENCE

Chemistry was the subject inspected in detail in this area. Biology, physics and environmental science lessons were also sampled. Brief descriptions of what was seen follow the chemistry report.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good because teachers use their subject knowledge to plan carefully structured lessons which help students cope with the demands of the subject.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning and work hard in order to achieve as well as they can.
- Leadership and management are very good, ensuring that student achievement is the driving force for the department.
- Relationships are very good, students can discuss their learning needs openly and teachers make themselves available to support them.
- The curriculum is relevant and up to date and students find it helpful to their other subjects.
- Students cannot always be taught in laboratories, which adversely affects the sequencing of theory and practical work.

Commentary

188. In recent years results have normally been above average. Standards in examinations were about average in 2003. Value added data shows that the majority of students performed as well as expected or better. Overall figures were lowered by the underachievement of a small number of students due to factors beyond the school's control.

189. Standards seen in lessons were above average. In Year 13, students applied what they had learnt to classify practical observations in terms of reaction types and changes in oxidation state. They asked appropriate questions, making good use of technical vocabulary. In a Year 12 lesson, a large group of students worked very efficiently to compare theoretical and practical values for enthalpies of combustion of a family of alcohols. They covered a lot of work in the fifty-minute period. Written work in both years showed that students kept very good records of their work. They were able to make comprehensive notes and apply thought to explain ideas and solve problems.

190. Students choosing to study chemistry start from a broadly average GCSE base and make good progress to reach above average standards.

191. Learning is very good because teachers know their subject very well and plan well structured lessons which help students follow the development of chemical ideas. Teachers are enthusiastic about chemistry and make lessons interesting, stimulating and challenging. Students recognise this challenge and respond well to it. Relationships are open and supportive so that students feel confident to say what they do not understand. Teachers make themselves available outside formal lessons so that they can sort out any difficulties. Teachers use time well so that lessons have a brisk pace and students are focused throughout sessions. Students like the Salter's syllabus because it relates to the real world and helps with other subjects that they study. Regular assessment keeps students on track and identifies any underachievement so that it can be tackled early.

192. Leadership provides good role models for staff and students. There is a clear focus on raising achievement which drives the work of the department. Teachers work well together to deliver a coherent learning experience for all students. They are very well supported by the technical team who share the departmental vision. Very good management makes the department run smoothly so that efforts can be focused on learning needs.

193. Lack of laboratory space puts extra stress on the department. Teachers, technicians and students are all aware of the resulting constraints on the way they can tackle their work. Students do not like the way that the logical sequence of the subject can be affected by the need to separate practical and theoretical work artificially.

194. Little mention was made of chemistry as a discrete subject in the last report so it is not possible to judge on improvement since then.

Three other science subjects sampled during the inspection

195. Biology: Standards in examinations are above average. In the lessons seen teaching was good. A detailed use of technical vocabulary was helped by an ICT simulation, so that students achieved well in showing how polyploidy can lead to speciation.

196. Physics: One Year 13 lesson was observed, in which teaching and learning were very good. These were based upon sound teacher knowledge, interesting activities and an effective dialogue with the students.

197. Environmental science: A very good lesson was seen in which Year 12 students were involved in research of renewable energy resources, using a variety of sources and producing summary notes suitable for others to use. The work showed that students have made a good start and are producing work of an average standard for this stage of the course.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although students taking the A level course achieve satisfactorily during the course, not many succeed in gaining the highest grades in public examinations.
- Good individual provision meets the needs of a small group of highly motivated and capable students.
- While the marking of coursework is good, that of other tasks is too cursory.
- The use of prior results to set and monitor targets is too inconsistent.
- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning.

- The good response of students contributes well to their achievement and they express generally positive opinions about the course.

198. A level results were below average in 2003. This was an improvement upon 2002, when the A/B rate was well below average. The success rate at AS Level is also below average.

199. The standards of current Year 13 students are in line with the national average. All know about different types of computer system, identifying, for example, the characteristics of a network. Most are able to compare the relative merits of networks and stand-alone systems, can identify problems that occur with networks and suggest some solutions to these. A small group of enthusiastic and able students were seen working independently at above average standards when designing systems to meet identified needs.

200. Students start Year 12 with generally average standards. They achieve satisfactorily during the course, by progressing at a rate that maintains their work at expected levels. They learn how to use the tools and techniques of a range of software, how to analyse the needs of users and then to design systems to meet these. This was seen, for example, when students thought about how a spreadsheet could be used to create a system for organising motor insurance transactions. However, students are not succeeding in fully representing these standards in their examination results. At A level, although almost all pass by securing at least grade E, few manage to gain the highest grades. A small group of highly motivated and capable students is given good individual provision by following a computing course, better suited to their aspirations and interests.

201. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and are sometimes good. Teachers give clear instructions and guidance, so that students know how to carry out tasks appropriately. This is often enhanced with helpful written guidance, or demonstrations, making use of a large screen. Relationships are usually conducive to learning, as in one lesson, when discussion between a group of students and the teacher was carried out in a relaxed, but productive way. Coursework is marked comprehensively and the helpfulness of this in guiding students towards improvement is reinforced by verbal feedback and discussion. The marking of some individual homework tasks is, however, too cursory to be of much help to students. Teachers do not always ensure that all students take part in discussions, or that all pay attention to spoken guidance, by checking that they are not engrossed in their own work at the time.

202. The students respond well in lessons by approaching tasks with commitment and effort. A few are highly enthusiastic and willingly seek opportunities to work independently. In some lessons in which teaching is satisfactory, the good response of students, in working with commitment and concentration, means that they nevertheless achieve well. During a formal discussion and when asked in lessons, students expressed positive opinions about the course, valuing its relevance and interest and considering teachers to be well informed and helpful. They also offered thoughtful ideas for improvement by, for example, making the theory side of the course more interesting and ensuring different teachers do not repeat earlier learning. Surprisingly, in view of the mature thoughtfulness of responses, the department does not systematically seek the views of students as a guide towards improvement.

203. Leadership and management and improvement since the last inspection, are satisfactory. Analysis of prior attainment in order to identify the needs of students and set and monitor targets is developing though teachers are not always aware of students' prior ICT attainment when setting targets. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to share good practice is also in its early stages. The development of resources is a particular strength as the school has significantly improved the numbers and quality of its computers and manages these well, to the benefit of students taking the taught courses and making use of ICT in other subjects.

ICT across the curriculum

204. The school provides well for students who need to use computers in the various subjects of the curriculum, both in lessons and for individual study. Resources have been significantly improved so that they are now of good quality and managed well to provide good access. All sixth form subjects use computers at least satisfactorily and most do so well.

205. There are particular strengths in French and physical education, where ICT is very good and English and media studies, where it is excellent. Students of French are strongly encouraged to use the Internet for research, which enhances their achievement. In physical education, students use digital cameras very effectively to analyse their performance. The English and media studies courses share a high quality suite of computers, which are used thoughtfully and effectively to support students in independent learning by, for example, contributing to the departmental intranet site.

206. Overall, when students work with computers, they demonstrate standards, through competence and confidence in using the packages and creative choice making, which are above average for sixth form students who are not taking a specialist ICT course. This is shown for example, in the independent and confident way in which students use the internet for research, word processors and PowerPoint to present their work and specialist programs in such subjects as product design.

HUMANITIES

In addition to geography and RE that were both inspected in detail, inspectors also sampled lessons in sociology and history.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement, especially in geographical knowledge and understanding, is good.
- Teaching is good and relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- The development of students' geographical skills is underdeveloped.
- Although teachers assess students' work satisfactorily, there is insufficient use of the information to plan work for individual students' needs, or to ensure that students are clear about what it is they need to do to improve.
- A very strong programme of fieldwork makes a very good contribution to students' learning.

Commentary

207. Over recent years, results in A level geography have fluctuated, varying from well above national averages to in line with national averages, and there has been no clear trend, as the variation has largely depended upon the capabilities of students choosing to study the subject. However, most frequently, the results have been in line with national averages, as in 2003. The results for A/S level, which were below the national average in 2002 have improved, to be in line with the national average. There are no significant differences in the performance of any particular groups of students.

208. The standards seen during the inspection matched those represented in the results and are in line with national averages. There are few students who are likely to achieve higher grades in the subject. Students have a secure factual knowledge and they use geographical language accurately. They are able to understand concepts relating to human geography, such as

population change, and make satisfactory links between these human aspects and their knowledge of physical geography.

209. Fieldwork has been used very well to help students understand urban land use and development. They can use data and graphs to identify trends and make simple comparisons. Although students can use maps to locate places, both in the United Kingdom and worldwide, they are less skilled in using maps, and other resources such as photographs or data, to interpret, research and hypothesise.

210. In both Years 12 and 13, there are fewer higher attaining students than is usual, and overall the level of capability at the beginning of Year 12 was below that expected nationally, so their current standards represent good achievement. All students achieve well, especially in gaining knowledge and developing their understanding. Their factual recall is quick and accurate and they have developed a secure grasp of more complex ideas such as the phenomenon of El Nino and its impact on countries to the east and west of the Pacific.

211. The aspect of their achievement which is less well developed is that of acquiring the skills of thinking geographically and asking geographical questions for themselves, rather than depending on the teacher to prompt them. Their gains in analysing, synthesising, looking for comparisons and seeking distributions are underdeveloped and they have been given too few opportunities to develop these skills, although fieldwork makes an important contribution.

212. Teaching and learning are good, with some very strong features. Students make good gains in their knowledge because teachers take care to use brisk activities at the start of lesson to ensure that students' factual recall is developed. Their conceptual development is reinforced well by different, consolidating activities that ensure students understand the work they are doing. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, students were given time to research El Nino and, working in pairs, they had to create a sheet of information to share with the rest of the class through a formal presentation. In order to carry out this activity, students had to understand the El Nino phenomenon so that they could explain to their peers and by the end of the lesson, all students in the class had gained knowledge about why El Nino happens and its impact around the world.

213. Very good relationships between teachers and students make a significant contribution to learning, as there is a sense of collaboration, and from the students an enthusiastic desire to learn. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and their confidence inspires and engages students. They also make the purpose of lessons clear and this helps students to retain knowledge and be able to make connections between ideas.

214. Teachers mark students work well and students are assessed satisfactorily, but this information is insufficiently used to plan lessons in order to ensure that all students are suitably challenged. At times, the few higher attaining students are insufficiently extended. Similarly, although there is detailed guidance in the marking of students' work, this is not always translated into clear communication of areas for students to improve.

215. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Teachers work together well and the subject leader has a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject but, as yet, has had little opportunity to make changes to a few minor areas of provision. However, improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and the subject looks well placed to improve further.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good teacher-student relationships and good teaching are enabling students to achieve well.
- The very good assessment of timed essays enables students to focus on areas of improvement.
- Students are not always encouraged to give full oral answers to questions.

Commentary

216. In 2003, the A level examination results were at the national average although the small numbers make a statistical analysis invalid. Results over the last few years have varied from being well above the national average to below the national average but again small numbers make a valid statistical analysis impossible. AS results in 2003 were well above average.

217. Achievement is good. Virtually all students obtain grades above that predicted by their previous levels of attainment.

218. The standard of work seen in lessons of the current Year 12 is at least in line with expectations at this stage in the course and the work of Year 13 students is above average. A number of the highest attainers have not continued from AS due to other subject commitments. The students were seen coming to terms with various views on ethics and applying them to actual situations. Year 13 students are less confident in approaching their coursework.

219. Teaching is good overall and this is resulting in current students making good progress. Very good subject knowledge of teachers, evident in their lesson planning and in the answers to students' questions, enables students to understand difficult concepts. Teachers have excellent relationships with students who respond very well to the challenging teaching and are motivated to read around the subject and develop their independent learning skills. However short and one word answers are often accepted and so opportunities to develop answers linked to the examination requirements are missed, and at times the teachers tend to fill in the answer rather than use developmental questioning. Enhancement opportunities, in listening to speakers and attending conferences on related topics, are good. Support given to students with special educational needs is very good and suitable to the individuals concerned. ICT is mainly used for research and word processing of work.

220. The leadership of the subject is very good and management good. The teachers provide very good role models and there is a clear focus to improve but the monitoring of data is still developing. Religious education is provided for all students in the sixth form, as required by the Agreed Syllabus and during the inspection a visiting speaker challenged the students to consider various personal beliefs. The work meets statutory requirements but the assessment scheme needs to be brought in line with the Agreed Syllabus requirements.

221. A simple comparison to the last report cannot be made as the introduction of AS means that it was not possible to continue the joint religious studies and philosophy course. Standards are rising, resources have improved and the subject has maintained its vitality so improvement is good.

Two other humanities subjects sampled

222. History: In a Year 12 lesson, teaching and learning were good, when effective planning and a range of teaching methods led to individual achievement matching the students' potential well.

223. Sociology: A Year 12 lesson was satisfactory when students were dutiful in taking notes but some opportunities were missed to deepen understanding through discussion.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology (Product design)

The quality of provision in product design is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Students attain above average standards and achievement is very good.
- Teaching expertise is very good and very effective team work takes place in the planning and delivery of the course.
- The development of good levels of knowledge and understanding about materials and the design process enables students to become more independent designers.
- Students develop awareness of the role of the designer and the effects of technology in society.
- Very effective assessment procedures enable students to improve their work.

Commentary

224. A level results in 2003 were above national average. Students make substantial progress through the course and achievement is very good.

225. All students make very good advances in knowledge, understanding and skills as they progress through the course and as a result they achieve very well. They are good at analysing existing products and developing design briefs. They carry out substantial in-depth research and are able to develop and evaluate a good range of individual and creative ideas. The quality of coursework improves as students progress through the course. The standard of work in folders is very good and, in some cases, excellent. Presentation of coursework is a particular strength. Students use a wide range of recording techniques to express their ideas and computers are used very effectively to support and present the work. Students have very positive attitudes and display high levels of concentration in lessons. Students and teachers work in close partnership and working relationships in lessons are excellent.

226. Teaching and learning are very good. Courses are very well planned and taught very effectively. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and this is used very well to plan and deliver very well-structured lessons. Teachers have very high expectations of students and their work, and this promotes very good learning. Regular monitoring and assessment of work, linked to individual feedback to students in lessons, is very effective in reinforcing learning and enabling students to improve their work. A good range of teaching methods are used and available time is used very effectively. Students demonstrate high levels of commitment.

227. Leadership and management of the course are very good. Teachers work very cooperatively in the planning and delivery of the course. As a result, courses provide structured and well-organised experiences for all students.

228. Overall improvement since the last inspection is good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

In addition to the detailed inspection of A level art and design and media studies, seven other subjects in the subject field were also sampled including AVCE art and design, dance, music, music technology, photography, theatre studies and textiles.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers show good subject knowledge that challenges and inspires students.
- A wide range of subjects and courses is provided.
- Results show added value in relation to students' prior attainment.
- Students are keen workers and make the most of available opportunities.
- Single lessons restrict some areas of the curriculum.

Commentary

229. Overall results in A level art in 2003 were broadly in line with average standards, although there was a lower proportion of A and B grades than in 2002. The results in AS examinations were about average in 2003.

230. The work of current students shows standards that are above average. Students are offered a wide range of curricular opportunities and achieve well, improving upon their GCSE results. They experiment with materials and make connections between their own work and work of other designers and artists. Students show good use of critical analysis in their resource boards and personal studies. They work well independently in the studio area, where they can work on a large scale, and collaboratively, for example in photography.

231. Teachers advance students' knowledge, understanding and skills beyond those acquired at the end of Year 11. Art courses include practical work, research, presentations, discussions, tutorials, extra-curricular activities and visits. Work sampled showed that students have carried out thoughtful investigations and creative exploration of ideas, using a variety of media, all of which lead to good achievement.

232. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, which enables students to learn a wide range of skills. The single lessons, however, impact on the development and depth of work achieved at any one time. Trips out during lessons are difficult. Organisation of the variety of courses that cover art, textiles and photography, is strong and planning is thorough. All are designed to develop progressively students' knowledge and skills. The use of resources by teachers is good, and inspires students to learn. Students discuss their work enthusiastically with a mature attitude, and are keen to take part in extra-curricular activities. They make good progress as a result of teachers' verbal and written assessments, which give clear guidelines as to how to improve. Lessons are characterised by a very positive, informal working relationship between students and staff.

233. Leadership and management are good. New courses have been introduced in photography, textiles and AVCE art. Students have benefited from these additional opportunities. The textiles and AVCE courses are managed independently, outside of the art department. The team of teachers within the department offer a wide range of skills and experience. Good systems are in place to analyse performance, set targets for students and assess their work. Displays in the school reflect the good provision of art.

234. Since the last inspection, expectations and challenge in teaching have improved as a result of increased specialist art knowledge. Specialist ICT facilities need updating.

Media studies

Provision in media studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There was a significant improvement in A-level results in 2003 and current standards in practical work are well above national average.
- Teaching is very good: stimulating students to learn yet well matched to exam requirements.
- Students use high quality technology very effectively.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- Students do not always discuss media issues in sufficient depth or breadth.
- Parts of some lessons are too slow and lose sight of what students need to learn.

Commentary

235. Results in the 2002 A-level examinations were at the national average. Girls gained much better grades than boys, who tended to make more progress in other subjects. 2003 results showed a marked improvement and were above national average, with two thirds of students gaining the highest grades. This represented very good achievement from AS level results, and the gap between boys' and girls' performance narrowed.

236. Over 70 students are currently taking media studies. The course attracts students with a wide range of abilities and interests. They soon learn to research issues through the departmental intranet. This gives them access to a wide range of ideas about media culture, techniques, theory and presentation. Most learn how to apply and use theory. The understanding and use of correct terminology is evident both in class discussion and group work. Students develop the skills of evaluating their own and others' work, and seeking ways of improvement. The majority can see and offer alternative viewpoints and justify opinions.

237. Students' achievement is very good. A number opt for media studies having gained grades C or D in GCSE examinations. They learn to use note-taking and research skills effectively and many show very good levels of independence and initiative. This is best seen in their practical work, some of which is excellent. Whilst discussion skills become good, they are not always demonstrated in whole class situations, where some girls stay quiet and some boys dominate. The open nature of many tasks benefits the majority but some boys would, on occasion, be helped by more structured work which would point the direction for their ideas.

238. Teaching is very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and an infectious enthusiasm for the subject. They show skill in preparing students for examinations without allowing requirements to straitjacket their teaching. A major feature is the extensive intranet prepared by the department. This gives access to a range of sources including articles, summaries, course and skills requirements, and past film work to inform and inspire. It is excellent for its clarity, accessibility, and relevance. Very well planned lessons explain and explore theory, relating it to known works. On occasion, teachers make too many indiscriminate references too quickly, so that the theme and focus of the lesson can become unclear to students. Class discussion becomes mediocre as a result. Another relative weakness is sections of lessons where the pace becomes rather slow because teachers talk too generally for too long.

239. The leadership and management of the department are very good. It is very well organised and resources have been carefully acquired and intelligently used. There is a strong sense of shared purpose evident in the considerable extra commitment of teachers and most students to

completing, recording and editing practical work. The curriculum is very good, students also being able to follow a film studies course. Accommodation and resources are excellent. Students have ready access to a range of high quality media technology. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Strengths have been sustained or built on, and teaching has improved. Increased access to technology, and teachers' exemplary use of it as a learning tool, have been major features in raising standards.

Seven other subjects were sampled

240. AVCE Art: The quality of teaching seen was good. Consequently, students made good progress and achieved well. Areas covered in the course include textiles, product design, metalwork and information communication technology. Standards of the work that was seen were above average.

241. Dance: One lesson was observed in Year 12 AS level dance. In this lesson the teaching was excellent and students, as a result, achieved extremely well considering their lack of experience in contemporary dance. Teaching showed excellent knowledge and infectious enthusiasm so that attitudes and behaviour were at the highest level.

242. Music: Two Year 12 lessons were sampled. The achievement of students was good because of thorough and committed teaching.

243. Music technology: Two lessons were sampled, one in each year. Students made good gains in knowledge, understanding and skills because of effective demonstration and instruction. The limitations of accommodation and resources were well managed and the skills of a specialist technician were used effectively to support students' learning.

244. Photography: The quality of teaching and learning in photography was good, and students achieved well. Standards of work were above average, showing that students have developed a wide range of technical expertise. Students work very well independently in this area on a variety of tasks.

245. Theatre studies: Very good teaching resulted in students working very hard and achieving very well.

246. Textiles: In a Year 12 lesson, enthusiastic teaching motivated the students to learn well and achieve good standards. Students made good progress and were enthusiastic about their work. The displays of work were informative and inspirational, encouraging more students to take up the subject.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

In addition to physical education, the AVCE in leisure and recreation was also sampled.

Physical education

Provision for physical education is **good** with some **very good** features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good overall, often very good, and results in students achieving well.
- Standards are above average.
- Leadership is very good and the department is well managed.
- Relationships are very strong and, consequently, attitudes and behaviour are at least good.
- In a minority of lessons, questions asked by teachers do not challenge students to give answers in sufficient depth.

Commentary

247. All students who took the A level examination in 2003 achieved at least an A – E grade and the percentage achieving A – B grades was above average. This is an improvement over the past 5 years when results have been average at best. Results in the AS examination in 2003 were slightly below average, especially at higher grades.

248. Standards seen in Year 12 AS lessons were above average and students were achieving well, making very good progress since GCSE. They have good knowledge of the importance of reaction time in different sports. In learning about the connection between the cardio-vascular and respiratory systems they have very good knowledge of anatomical vocabulary. Practical standards are average but students have good knowledge of the principles of play in soccer. Analysis of work folders shows the standards to be above average with good knowledge of contemporary issues in sport and factors leading to skill acquisition. In Year 13 A level groups the standards are slightly above average overall. Students achieve well when analysing the performance of others in line with examination requirements though lack some confidence in completing assessment activities. They show very good ICT skills when producing leaflets showing their increasing knowledge of the similarities and differences between sporting systems in different countries. This and other work in folders shows that standards of evaluation and presentation are above average.

249. Some very good teaching was seen and it was never less than satisfactory. As a result, students learn and achieve well. Significant features of the very good teaching are very strong relationships which mean that attitudes and behaviour are at least good in most lessons. Lessons are planned with clear objectives and progressions so that students know what they are to learn. Teachers have very good knowledge and challenge students to think carefully in order to give more depth to their analysis of the performance of others. Teachers make good use of different teaching styles and resources in well-paced lessons which keep students interested and on task. Explanations and instructions are clear enabling students to apply their new knowledge in appropriate practical tasks. In a minority of lessons, however, tasks are not sufficiently challenging to enable students to give depth to their answers.

250. The department is very well led and well managed. Students know how well they are doing as a result of good procedures to monitor progress. Good analysis of data has resulted in improved standards as teaching is more focused. Students are given good opportunity to use ICT for analysis of performance and presentations using a range of applications. There is a very good match of teachers to the courses and good support is given to inexperienced teachers.

251. The subject was not a focus in the last inspection but standards have improved recently.

One subject was sampled

252. Leisure and recreation: In two Year 13 lessons, teaching and achievement were satisfactory, although students were sometimes unwilling to contribute much to their own learning.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The overall provision for health and social care is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in terms of both the qualification and their personal skills.
- The teaching is good with some very good features.
- The students' learning is well supported by practical opportunities.
- ICT use is little used in coursework.

Commentary

253. Results in 2003 were in line with the national average in terms of average points scores with all students being successful at gaining a pass.

254. Current standards in the lessons and work seen are in line with the national average. Students show a sound understanding of human development and, with guidance, are able to relate the development points to their own case studies. Similar standards were seen in a lesson on social services where students identified particular services relevant to specific care provision. Background knowledge of students was patchy but, once identified, they could link the new knowledge to their own experiences.

255. Achievement is good given students' modest GCSE attainments and this is evident not only in improving literacy skills but also in students' developing self-confidence seen in group work.

256. Teaching and learning are good overall with some very good features. Teachers are interested in and particularly well informed about the health and social care sector and this was evident in their individual advice and guided discussion. They were able to direct students to identify different sources of information and approaches to investigations. Group work was handled expertly with opportunities for students to lead activities and work in groups. This helped students develop oral skills, improve self-confidence and learn to evaluate their work. This was particularly evident in a communication session where students were trialling 'icebreaker' activities, designed to stimulate conversation with their target group of young children.

257. Course activities reflect the emphasis on vocational relevance. Assignments have a practical context in which students are able to apply their developing knowledge and understanding. Assessment is generally secure. Teachers share with students the grade criteria in order to encourage them to be more analytical and evaluative, skills which are needed for the higher grades. Overall, the provision is well managed and the course provides valuable breadth to the largely GCE A level curriculum of the sixth form.

BUSINESS

In addition to the detailed inspection of economics, AVCE in business was sampled.

Economics

Provision in economics is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Students achieve well at AS-level and A-level.
- Teaching is very good, with effective teamwork by subject specialists.
- Good relationships and the sharing of ideas during lessons contribute to good learning.
- Students' attitudes and approach to their work are good.
- Good real-world experiences are provided by Young Enterprise and residential activities.

Commentary

258. Students follow a modular economics and business studies integrated course with three modules at both AS and A-level. The structure includes evidence and extended writing questions, portfolio pieces and pre-issued evidence.

259. Recent results at both levels have been close to the national averages in economics. This has represented good achievement over the study time of the course. There has been some inconsistency in the proportion of grades at the higher levels and in the relative performance of male and female students.

260. These previous standards of attainment were reflected in the quality of work seen during the inspection. Students are attentive and confident in their acquisition and utilisation of economic and business terminology and concepts. Skills of analysis and evaluation are demonstrated throughout lessons. This was seen in Year 13 lessons examining marketing strategies and preparing for a case study on newspapers. Notes taken during lessons, supported by well-selected and prepared source materials, are accurate and detailed. Essays and coursework are structured and written with a balance across information, source materials and judgements.

261. Real economy situations are closely considered, as observed in a Year 12 lesson looking at the relationship between price and demand. Significant extended opportunities during the AS course are gained from participation in Young Enterprise companies and in a residential activity in North Devon.

262. Teaching observed was very good or excellent, displaying a thorough and applied command of the subject. Relationships and teaching strategies enable students to enjoy open discussions and shared learning. This is supported by an emphasis upon study techniques and examination requirements. The teamwork amongst teachers benefits classroom expertise to the advantage of all groups.

263. The subject is very well led and managed, the basis being a course well matched to students' needs and abilities. Resources are up to date, including business reviews and videos. ICT supports research and assignments. Documentation and policies make very clear how the subject seeks to be relevant and to support learning and achievement. The upward trend in results since the time of the last inspection demonstrates the subject's development and success.

One subject was sampled

264. Business studies: One Year 12 lessons was seen. Teaching and learning were satisfactory. Students had a good relationship with the teacher and each other but were sometimes too relaxed to produce as much work as they could.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Two areas were sampled

General studies. A Year 13 lesson took the form of a talk, led by a visiting speaker, a local bishop. This was excellent, because of the balanced way a range of contemporary news topics were tackled, the very high level interest, thoughtfulness and willingness to participate of the students and the extremely skilled way in which this was managed by the speaker.

Social education. The school's social education programme provides guidance on a range of topics, including careers and health, the areas covered in the two lessons seen, one in each year. Both were very good, because of the relevance of the focus and the quality of guidance given.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

poor (6); very poor (7).