

INSPECTION REPORT

HUXLOW SCHOOL

Irthlingborough

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122053

Headteacher: Mr David Gill

Lead inspector: Dr David Benstock

Dates of inspection: 13th – 16th October 2003

Inspection number: 259829

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

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Terms used in this report

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

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	758
School address:	Finedon Road Irthlingborough Wellingborough Northamptonshire
Postcode:	NN9 5TY
Telephone number:	01933 650496
Fax number:	01933 653435
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter Kelby
Date of previous inspection:	9 th November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Huxlow School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school, and is smaller than average size. It is situated in the small market town of Irthlingborough and the school serves the local area of the town and the nearby village of Finedon. The socio-economic background reflects the circumstances of families, often having below average experience of higher education and experiencing some social deprivation. The great majority of pupils have white British heritage. The number of students with English as an additional language is low. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average, and the number of pupils identified as having special educational needs is above average. Pupil mobility was significant last year with approximately six per cent of pupils joining or moving from the school at other than usual times. The small but expanding sixth form has classes that are shared with three other schools, forming a substantial consortium. The school has applied for specialist college status for science.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20243	David Benstock	Lead inspector	
9189	John Horwood	Lay inspector	
3643	Derek Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics; Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
4486	Michael Weller	Team inspector	English; English as an Additional Language
27984	Alan Whitehall	Team inspector	Science
18261	Anthony Hill	Team inspector	Art and Design; Special Educational Needs
24894	Clive Petts	Team inspector	Design and technology
15407	Muriel Harrison	Team inspector	Geography
19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History
4829	Ian Waters	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
31705	John Mason	Team inspector	Music; Personal, Social and Health Education /Citizenship

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3930	Roy Pitcher	Team inspector	Religious Education
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The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school with a good sixth form. It gives good value for money. Standards are broadly average and average in the sixth form. Pupils' achievement from entry to the school to the end of Year 11 is very good. It is excellent in science. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Attainment of pupils in Year 9 is well above average compared with similar schools. Overall the results in examinations have increased in line with the national trend. Teaching and learning are very good and pupils' attitudes towards learning are very good. Pupils behave well in class. The school is very supportive to pupils, provides very well for those with special educational needs and ensures that all pupils are given a chance and the encouragement to succeed. The leadership and management of the headteacher and other key staff are very good and provide a very clear direction for further development. They show exceptional determination to raise the quality of education. Governors are supportive but have not ensured that a daily act of collective worship is in place for all pupils.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- There is very good achievement of pupils from entry to the end of Year 11, and excellent achievement in science.
- The school adopts a totally inclusive approach in all aspects of the curriculum to enable all pupils to succeed, and especially those with special educational needs to be very well supported.
- Consistently good teaching and learning, with meticulous planning, are found throughout the school.
- Leadership and management in the school are very good overall but there is a need to develop the role of the head of department to be more accountable for monitoring and evaluation of teaching.
- There is very comprehensive analysis of performance data at senior management level to set targets for pupils' achievement in all subjects.
- Pupils exhibit very positive attitudes towards their studies and very good relationships with teachers enable learning to be very effective.
- Opportunities for developing independent learning or promoting speaking and listening skills, are not well enough exploited.
- ICT is not coordinated well enough across different subjects of the curriculum or used sufficiently by pupils in their learning

Since the school was last inspected in 1998, there has been good improvement. Standards have improved, especially so in Years 10 and 11, teachers' planning is more effective, leadership has improved, greater use is made of community and external links, and the school has grown significantly in size and popularity. In responding to the key issues of the 1998 inspection, attainment in mathematics, music and modern foreign languages has increased. A greater range of teaching styles has been introduced, and the co-ordination of special educational needs has become a strength of the school. Provision for design and technology now satisfies the requirements of the National Curriculum but there are still unsatisfactory arrangements for a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	D	C	C	A
Year 13	A/AS-level and VCE examinations	n/a	E	E	

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

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

Achievement of pupils is very good overall, and satisfactory in the sixth form. Standards of attainment overall in the National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in 2003 were average compared with all schools and well above average compared with similar schools. Results in science have been significantly better than in mathematics or English. Results were similar in 2002. The value added to pupils' attainment from Year 7 to 9 in 2002 was well above average and very high compared with similar schools. In the GCSE examinations, results in 2002 were average compared with all schools and well above average in similar schools. Achievement from Year 10 to Year 11 is very good. Good performance was found in science and geography, and less good in art and design and history. Standards in the sixth form are well below average but are improving.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. Overall, development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. Pupils attend well and are punctual to lessons, not least as a result of the excellent school procedures to monitor attendance. They show very good respect for each other's views, for teachers and for property. They understand right from wrong. Spiritual awareness is satisfactory. Citizenship does not yet contribute greatly to personal development

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Teaching is very good overall and good in the sixth form. Over one third of lessons seen were judged very good, and nearly 90 per cent were at least good. This very good teaching has significantly contributed to very good achievement. Opportunities for independent work by pupils and students are not always exploited. Assessment data is abundant and detailed but not used sufficiently in some departments. The school provides a good, broad and balanced curriculum. There is very good provision for special educational needs. Opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities are plentiful. The school goes to great lengths to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils and students. Accommodation is mainly good but there are inadequacies in physical education and private study facilities for the sixth form. Resources are sufficient overall but ICT resources are limited and access can be a barrier to achievement. The school provides a good level of care for pupils and actively seeks their views. Links with parents, external agencies, other schools and the community are good. There is an effective sixth form consortium with three neighbouring schools, which enhances the subject choices, increases group size and contributes to achievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, the leadership and management of the school are very good. In particular the headteacher has an excellent vision and sense of purpose in leading the school forward. The leadership and management of the key staff are good overall although there are inconsistencies between departments in monitoring teaching quality and commitment to using assessment data for planning or tracking

pupils' achievement. Governors provide good support and challenge, and are increasingly involved in strategic planning. Governance is judged good. However governors have not ensured that a daily act of collective worship of a largely Christian nature is provided for all pupils.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Overall, parents are pleased with the school. They particularly feel that their children are well cared for, are happy in school, are making good progress and that teaching is good. There is a little concern over perceived poor behaviour, but this was not found during inspection. They feel they are able to approach the school with a problem. Pupils and students are pleased to be at the school and feel they are taught well and expected to work hard. They also registered concern about some misbehaviour.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- develop the role of the head of department to be more accountable for monitoring and evaluation of teaching and proactively use assessment data to monitor achievement;
- develop independent learning and promote speaking and listening skills;
- ensure ICT is coordinated across different subjects of the curriculum and is used more by pupils in their learning;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure a daily act of collective worship is provided for all pupils and students.

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school has a good sixth form that is cost effective. In most ways the quality of teaching is good but students are not given enough responsibility for their own independent learning. Nevertheless, students make satisfactory progress. Until this year numbers of students in the sixth form have been very low. The significant increase in numbers this year demonstrates confidence in the sixth form as part of the consortium and the new head of sixth form has made a good start in developing it further. Being part of a consortium means that class sizes are sufficiently large to ensure that the sixth form is cost effective whilst still providing the few courses with smaller group sizes. The sixth form has a sound base from which to improve further.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- There is a wide range of courses available through the consortium.
- Teaching is good but not enough opportunity is given for independent learning.
- Provision for the students' development in citizenship is good.
- Very good advice and guidance are available within the small sixth form.
- The accommodation and resources for both study and social interaction are becoming too small as the student numbers increase.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English literature is good . Teaching is good, leading to students have good achievement. Communication between teachers within the consortium is good.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is good . Teaching and learning are good with students making a satisfactory start to their AS-level studies.
Science	Provision in chemistry is very good . The quality of the work produced, in response to excellent teaching, suggests that in the short time in the sixth form, students have shown very good achievement and attained standards above national standards.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in design technology is good . Teaching is good and often very good and results in work of a good standard in the AS-level course. The leadership and management of the department are good.
Humanities	Provision in history is satisfactory . Overall, teaching is good. Students achieve satisfactorily in a broad ability group, but lack independence of learning. The department is well led and managed.

Other subjects in the school were sampled including psychology, health and social care, music, Spanish and physical education. Teaching and learning in all these lessons were at least satisfactory.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The care and support for students are good. The small size of the sixth form enables the aims and needs of all students to be well known and to ensure they receive very good advice and guidance. Whilst many students spend a significant proportion of their time in lessons at other schools within the consortium they all spend two periods on a Thursday morning with their tutors for guidance on personal, social, health, citizenship and religious education, together with a one-to-one interview with the tutor every few weeks. Whilst there were difficulties last year with careers interviews through an external agency, the new head of sixth has arrangements in hand to ensure the appropriate advice is available this year. Information on university entrance is currently being made available to students and in future years this will be available to Year 12 students during the summer term.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership is **satisfactory** in the sixth form and management is **good**. Whilst only recently appointed the head of sixth form has made a good start to the further development of the sixth form. Having a relatively large Year 12 is a new experience for the school and this change has meant that the first priority of the head of sixth form was to successfully manage the integration of the larger numbers of students into the consortium arrangements – the consortium is long established and well managed. At the time of the inspection, the head of sixth form, who has already demonstrated her good management skills, was still developing her skills of leadership; her determination and commitment are clear, and as she gains in experience, she has the capacity to produce good leadership in a very short time.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are supportive of the sixth form and the wider opportunities it is able to offer by being part of a consortium. Whilst they agree that the requirement to move between sites does have a negative effect this is far outweighed by the greater independence and social skills they acquire. The only concerns they have are historical and are being addressed by the school for future students – these are based around lack of careers interviews prior to entry to the sixth form and the lateness of information about universities and their requirements.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

Overall standards of attainment are average compared with all schools. They are well above average compared to schools with similar prior attainment, and broadly average compared to schools in similar contexts. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well below average so they make very good progress and achieve very well to reach standards in line with national averages at the end of Years 9 and 11. In the sixth form there are relatively small A-level classes and not all of these are Huxlow students. Comparisons with national data are therefore tentative but attainment is close to average and achievement is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well during their time at school and make much better than expected progress, given their attainment on entry.
- Standards in science are well above national averages in Years 9 and 11, and pupils' achievement is outstanding.
- There is very good achievement in mathematics, above average standards in ICT in Years 9 and 11, and above average standards in geography in Year 11.
- Pupils' discussion skills, and their ability to offer extended oral contributions, are limited.

Commentary

1. In the National Curriculum tests in 2002 for Year 9, the overall attainment of pupils in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science was average compared with all schools and schools in similar contexts, but well above average compared to schools with similar prior attainment. Overall performance in science, mathematics and English was above average, average and below average respectively compared to all schools, but exceptionally high, well above average and above average, relative to schools with similar prior attainment. Attainment in national tests in English and mathematics has fluctuated around and below average over recent years, but in science standards have been consistently above average. The relative attainment of boys and girls has fluctuated over recent years but without any clear pattern being sustained; overall variations were similar to those seen nationally.
2. Overall results in the GCSE examinations in 2002 were average compared with all schools, but well above average compared to schools with similar prior attainment, reflecting the fact that very good progress is sustained into Years 10 and 11. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades was above average compared with all schools, although there was a small fall in this percentage in 2003. In 2002 results in science, Spanish and geography were particularly high, whereas they were very low in art and design, and low in history.
3. Pupils enter the school with attainment levels which are well below national averages. In particular, low literacy levels restrict progress in subjects such as English and history. The school's well-established target setting system combined with very good teaching in a range of subjects result in very good overall achievement in Years 7 to 9. The school has comprehensive data analysis systems, which provide hard evidence of continued very good progress in Years 10 and 11.
4. In English, average and lower attaining pupils are reluctant readers and rarely offer detailed explanations or extended contributions to discussion. In mathematics higher attaining pupils

accurately draw and correctly calculate the answers to trigonometric problems and lower attaining pupils can explain and carry out basic arithmetical operations. In science all pupils make excellent progress in their knowledge and understanding of scientific facts and in the development of their practical and investigative skills. In 2002 the achievement of Year 11 pupils in science was in the top five per cent of schools.

5. Pupils with special educational needs also make very good progress in attaining standards comparable with those nationally. Pupils progress rapidly in literacy, communication and spelling skills because of the use of kinaesthetic methods and very good teaching by special educational needs staff.
6. There is currently no school register of gifted and talented pupils, although baseline assessments at Year 7 do identify those gifted in core subjects. Some subject areas, such as music, set targets for talented pupils and extension work is incorporated into most lessons; as a result pupils achieve very well. In science gifted pupils achieve very highly in public examinations.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2002

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.0 (29.1)	33.3 (33.0)
Mathematics	34.1 (33.3)	34.7 (34.4)
Science	34.9 (34.9)	33.3 (33.1)

There were 141 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	55(50)	50 (48)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (91)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	39.6	39.8

There were 93 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Sixth form

7. The attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is significantly below equivalent national standards and results have been below average in recent years. The small number of Huxlow students in A-level classes and the consortium arrangements make national comparisons insecure. Standards in work and lessons seen are average overall although there is considerable variation between subjects; they are higher in chemistry and design and technology, and lower in English and history.

Standards in GCE A/AS-level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	100	95
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	31	39
Average point score per candidate	187.7	263.3

There were 13 students in the year group.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' personal development and their relationships with each other and with staff are very good. Behaviour is good and attitudes are very good. Attendance and punctuality are both good. Fixed term exclusions are relatively high compared to levels in other schools but permanent exclusions are rare. Moral development is very good, social development is good, and spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good relationships and moral development of pupils within the school and sixth form result in a very good learning environment.
 - The excellent systems in place for immediate follow-up of absence promote and encourage good attendance.
 - Rewards and sanctions systems are effective in encouraging good behaviour and learning.
 - The very small numbers of pupils who behave inappropriately in lessons and during the afternoon registration period are a distraction to others.
 - There is not a collective act of worship every day for all pupils.
8. Pupils like school and this results in good punctuality and good attendance records for most of them. Attendance rates have been consistently close to or above national average figures, with low levels of unauthorised absence. There are excellent systems in place to monitor attendance, to quickly identify absences and to ensure immediate follow-up, using external agencies if necessary. The majority of parents clearly encourage good attendance and quickly notify the school of any reason for absence.
 9. The pupils participate well in lessons and the inclusive teaching styles ensure that all pupils can contribute. During the inspection there were no lessons when behaviour issues affected the learning of others but pupils were concerned that a small minority of pupils do sometimes misbehave and that, sometimes, this is not challenged by the teacher. Whilst the number of temporary exclusions is relatively high this reflects the school's determination to enforce its high expectations of pupils' conduct. The rarity of permanent exclusions demonstrates the school's determination for inclusiveness, a feature of which is to take on as 'triallists' pupils who have been excluded from other schools. Whilst there is some bullying within the school it is always dealt with quickly and well.
 10. The pupils' personal development as they move through the school is very good and they quickly develop very good relationships and a good attitude to learning. They participate well both in lessons and in other activities as well as taking on the very good opportunities for responsibility such as being prefects or members of the school council.
 11. Spiritual development of pupils has improved since the last inspection and has been built into lesson planning forms and some departmental documents, and an audit of lessons has been held. The school has developed a termly 'Thought for the Day' poster, which indicates weekly foci

such as anger and forgiveness. The school does not meet statutory requirements because pupils only meet twice each week for collective worship. Moral development is a major strength of the school and pervades every aspect of school life, with the teachers acting as good role models. In the school all subjects strongly emphasise that all should respect the feelings, values and beliefs of all in society. Social development of pupils is closely linked to moral development and readily seen in attitudes in lessons and standards of behaviour generally. There are numerous opportunities to take responsibility through councils, elections, prefects, librarians, charity support and particularly in numerous extra-curricular activities. There is team interaction through the good range of sporting activities. Cultural development is promoted through the curriculum, which is permeated with references to and case studies of various faiths and lifestyles in historic and modern contexts. There are visits to Europe and more locally to such places as the theatre in Northampton. The major weakness is the lack of a specific contemporary multi-cultural studies course which would contribute to preparing the pupils for life in modern society.

Sixth form

12. The open access to the sixth form results in a wide range of abilities and attitudes. Behaviour is very good and the attitudes to learning are good overall. Students are fully involved in the sixth form council and the new head of sixth form is currently increasing opportunities for them to work as a group with a fund-raising initiative. A significant number of students are increasing their own personal development by supporting pupils in the lower school.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	7.6
National data	7.8

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.4
National data	1.2

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
726	61	0
10		
1		
2		
1		

Asian or Asian British – Indian	2		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani			
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi			
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	7		
Black or Black British – African			
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2		
Chinese	4	1	
Any other ethnic group			
No ethnic group recorded	1		

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good overall in the school and good in the sixth form. The consistently good or very good teaching leads to very good achievement. Assessment procedures are good and very effective in science.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In the majority of subjects, detailed and careful planning of lessons is strong and ensures pupils acquire knowledge and understanding very effectively and at a brisk pace.
- Most teachers have high expectations that are carefully targeted to motivate and challenge pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs.
- Pupils are supported very well in their learning so that they gain confidence, participate in discussions and make considerable effort to improve.
- Teaching quality and excellent assessment procedures in science have resulted in high achievement in this subject.
- The teaching of citizenship is not yet established to ensure learning comparable with other subjects. There is insufficient challenge and pupils are not motivated; assessment does not ensure pupils know how to improve.

Commentary

13. The quality of teaching and learning is good or very good in nearly all subjects. Learning is less effective in design and technology in Years 10 and 11, and in citizenship. Teaching is very good in mathematics, science, ICT, geography, and modern languages, where the planning together with the expectations teachers have of pupils lead to significant levels of motivation and achievement.

14. In nearly all subjects, the meticulous planning of the lesson objectives, ensuring work is appropriate for pupils of different abilities, is a key factor. Challenging targets are set for pupils and they respond enthusiastically to reach them.
15. Assessment procedures are good in most subjects and data provided by senior staff is used well. Careful reference is made to target levels resulting from prior attainment in National Curriculum tests in Year 6 and from cognitive abilities tests. Targets and progress made towards reaching them are clearly known by pupils. Homework is used well in most subjects, but less so in design and technology, ICT, mathematics and physical education.
16. Learning support assistants offer a high quality of support to both pupils with special educational needs and teachers. They know pupils well and plan targets for each lesson, which enables them to track their progress effectively. The great majority of teachers make very good use of the learning support assistants. One or two lessons were seen in which learning support assistants were not effectively deployed and were not able to carry out their planned support tasks. Excellent support was seen in a lesson of ICT in which the teacher worked sensitively with the learning support assistant. Special educational needs teachers who withdraw pupils for literacy or communication skills teach very well. The use of kinaesthetic methods for teaching spelling skills is very effective and leads to rapid progress for the target pupils. Very good relationships help pupils to build their self-confidence and learn important social skills. Learning support assistants are well trained in managing the independent learning programme and make very good use of the short literacy booster sessions in the education support department.
17. The school has developed a very good, fluent system for establishing and tracking the progress of pupils against targets set in Year 7. Pupils are monitored and supported well throughout their time, including the sixth form. Targets are reviewed twice a term and pupils are well aware of the targets and how to use them. This has enabled the school to add significant value to pupils' education over their school lives, ending with impressive results in public examinations. Targets are set high and both pupils and teachers work well towards them. Some subject departments have targets that are set on a narrow base and there is limited subject bias built into them. The use of pupil self-assessment is variable between departments, with music using it well and physical education limiting pupils' opportunities to evaluate their own performance, thereby missing opportunities for independent learning. Marking is generally thorough and helpful to pupils, enabling them to improve their work.

Sixth form

18. Teaching and learning, overall, are good in the sixth form. Teaching is provided in the consortium with three other schools, which ensures greater opportunities for shared ideas and discussion. Students are nurtured well and given every encouragement to succeed. Opportunities are not always taken, however, to promote more independent learning. Planning is of high quality. Expectations are often high although the level of work challenges some students. Students are, as in the main school, assessed, monitored and supported well.

Year 7 Exemplary Practice in Music

Over several lessons one pupil, anxious to seek the attention of the teacher, had inadvertently made the class difficult to teach. At the start of the lesson, this pupil was spoken to very fairly and accepted the teacher's strategy of writing any comments she wanted to make on to a small whiteboard. Holding up the whiteboard, and with the support of an assistant, the teacher was able to praise the pupil for her contribution in class and draw her into discussion at appropriate moments, without the pupil disturbing the flow of the lesson. Under the motto "We listen to you, you listen to us", the teacher was then better placed to address minor restlessness from other pupils. All pupils listened very carefully to two pieces of music and responded well in discussion about their contrasting features, developing vocabulary and leading to related practical work. Here the attention-seeking pupil felt she

might have been given a greater role, but the teacher praised her for the patience which she had developed during the lesson and rewarded her with the promise to be among the first to play instruments next lesson.

Year 7 Exemplary Practice in Science

Year 7 pupils in the first half term study a series of lessons on the structure of cells. There is a range of pupils' work displayed, which enhances the atmosphere for learning. This lesson is to link cells to tissues and tissues to organs and introduce the notion of organ systems.

Pupils were made aware of the learning objectives. They were given a short time in small groups to share their understanding of cells and tissues. In this way they were immediately brought into actively consolidating their own knowledge and that of the other group members.

A video clip showing the mitosis of cells followed a brisk, clear explanation of cellular division. The attention of higher attaining pupils was drawn to the movement of the chromosomes and the term mitosis. Insistence on correct grammar assisted the development of relatively poor literacy skills. The pupils were challenged and their skill in independent learning encouraged, with the use of questions of three levels of complexity. Extension work was also available for early finishers. The plenary session used the responses to carefully constructed questions to assess the effectiveness of the learning in the lesson.

This combination of high expectation and challenging work together with rigorous assessment is a major reason for the high achievement.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 124 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4(4)	38 (30)	60 (48)	21(17)	1(1)	0	0

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

The curriculum

The school provides a good range of learning opportunities. The range of learning opportunities provided for students in the sixth form is very good. Opportunities for enrichment outside lessons are good. The accommodation is good, and resources to support pupils' learning are satisfactory.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- The school provides very good access and equality of opportunity for all its pupils to the full range of available activities.
- The provision made for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- Opportunities for pupils to enrich their learning through participation in sport and the arts and through educational visits are good.
- The school is currently failing to meet the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all its pupils.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply the skills of ICT in their learning across the curriculum.

Commentary

19. The school is smaller than most secondary schools, but the headteacher and senior managers have worked effectively to provide a good range of learning opportunities. The curriculum has improved well since the time off the last inspection. A numeracy policy is now in place and the

co-ordination of provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The requirement is now met to teach design and technology in Years 10 and 11. However, the school still does not meet the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Pupils are very positive about the range of learning opportunities available to them.

20. The school also provides good support for pupils in terms of their personal and social education and in the careers advice it gives them in both the main school and the sixth form. The provision made to support pupils' learning outside the school day is also good. For example, pupils have access to the school's library and to computers to help them with their homework.
21. There is a satisfactory match of teachers to the requirements of the curriculum. Accommodation is good, with the exception of that provided for physical education, which is unsatisfactory. The resources to support pupils' learning are satisfactory. The learning centre provides many lively and varied activities, which considerably enrich pupils' and students' experiences.
22. Individual education plans support pupils with special educational needs in overcoming the individual barriers to their learning. They are informative and well structured, to guide staff in supporting individual special educational needs. At present targets on individual education plans are not focused sharply on the specific needs of each pupil and it is difficult for pupils to see precisely how they can meet those targets.
23. There is no school register of gifted and talented pupils, although baseline assessments at Year 7 do identify those gifted in core subjects. Some subject areas, such as music, are working with targets for the talented pupils in their subject and the recently appointed co-ordinator has made a very good start in building the foundation of a gifted and talented policy that will individualise the targets already available to staff.
24. Enrichment activities are planned into many schemes of work and most staff recognise the need to provide extension work for such pupils. The science department provides well for gifted pupils and they do very well in public examinations. There is a mathematics challenge set up as an extra curriculum activity. The co-ordinator is one of a group of teachers who organise events for the gifted and talented and is working to set up a consortium that will extend and formalise the initiative.
25. There are no pupils in the school at present that are on the early stages of learning English as an additional language. One such pupil arrived in Year 8 and received very good support in lessons and from regular weekly sessions from a visiting specialist from the local education authority. Her achievement in English and other subjects is very good. She attained above average levels in the national tests in Year 9 and attained an A* grade at GCSE in her first language (Russian) in Year 9. Because she is clearly a high attainer, the school has arranged for her to act as a language assistant at a Russian club at another school – a good example of support for the gifted and talented. All pupils with English as an additional language are achieving very well, are well supported and mix well with their peers.
26. The school has a good programme for personal, social and health education. There is an effective range of voluntary activities, which supplement the provision, including a stress clinic, counselling for addiction and opportunity to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

Sixth form

27. Students in the sixth form are very appreciative of the range of subjects they can choose to study. The consortium widens the choice considerably. There are many opportunities for participation in charity and community activities.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes good care of its pupils throughout the school. The provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. There are good systems in place for pupil involvement through seeking, valuing and acting on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Child protection and health and safety procedures are fully in place.
 - The pastoral system ensures that pupils are very well cared for. Pupils are well known to staff and all know whom to contact if they have a problem.
 - The pastoral database, which is being further developed, supports the high quality whole-school academic assessment system.
28. The school is a safe place with all areas of health and safety supported by comprehensive procedures, which have been reviewed as needed. Responsibilities are clearly defined and records are kept as required. Child protection procedures and responsibilities are well known to all staff. First aid procedures are clear with adequate trained staff always available; the school has a medical room and the school nurse provides services as required. The school has excellent procedures to monitor attendance and staff contact parents as soon as possible on the first day of absence to ensure pupils' well-being.
29. The pastoral system ensures that pupils are well cared for and supported. The very good relationships pupils have within the school, including with the support staff, ensure that they all have a good and trusting relationship with one or more adults. The school has developed a pastoral database, which, although in its early stage of development, together with the whole-school assessment system provides a secure basis on which guidance and advice can be given. The induction arrangements for pupils joining the school are good as a result of good liaison with the feeder primary schools.
30. The planned programme of careers education in Years 9 to 11 is good. In Year 9 there is a transition interview aimed at a successful choice of options in Years 10 and 11. There is a long list of local businesses involved in work experience for pupils in Year 10. Every pupil is placed and the placement monitored by a member of staff. The effectiveness of the work experience is assessed through interviews on return to school. Career choice in Year 11 is supported by staff from the Connexions service in consultation with the school's Connexions manager. Each pupil in Year 11 is entitled to a careers interview followed by an annual review. A small minority of students in Year 12 did not have this opportunity last year but this problem has been rectified for this year. In addition, speakers from a wide range of occupations attend assemblies and lunchtime sessions. There is a satisfactory range of books on careers and career information booklets in the library.

Sixth form

31. As an integral part of the main school the sixth form benefits from the main school strengths but these are enhanced with the smaller groups allowing more individual guidance opportunities. The Year 13 students are concerned that they were not given information about university entrance early enough and missed many of the open days. The head of sixth form has already arranged for this to be provided towards the end of Year 12 for current students to correct this difficulty. The

library contains the university prospectuses. Opportunities to be involved in the work of the school are very good within the sixth form through the sixth form council, and enrichment activities where students support the lower school pupils

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has good links with parents. Links with the community and with other schools and colleges are good for the main school and very good for the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Reports, newsletters, the school prospectus and the governors' annual report provide very good information for parents.
 - The consortium arrangements provide very good links with other schools.
 - The parental response is not in proportion to the school's effort.
32. Parents are supportive of the school and the majority think there is a good partnership with them. A significant number of parents were concerned about the homework arrangements, the information about progress and the lack of consultation with them. These are discussed within this report but were all found to be at least good.
33. The range of information sent to parents is very good and provides comprehensive information for them about the school and their child's progress. General information is provided through newsletters, specific topic letters, formal school publications and the school website. Information on progress is available through the very good reports each year, which are detailed and individual. The school is implementing tutor days early in the year to supplement the subject teacher evenings held later in the year. Each year group is also supplied with curriculum information. With many communications the school sends out a reply slip inviting parents to comment and every year sends out a questionnaire to determine their satisfaction; the number of responses from parents has been extremely low.
34. Links with the community are good. In Year 9, lectures are given by representatives from local industry and sporting groups. There are links with industry through the work experience programme and the school council's links with the local youth council. The school actively supports the local community by supporting police initiatives in the nearby area and following up issues with offenders in school the next day.
35. The school has good links with the primary feeder schools and very good links with the secondary schools within the consortium. There are regular meetings of the primary cluster, which go well beyond routine liaison, and the consortium of secondary schools has been long established for sixth form provision. The links with other schools and with the community have been strengthened through production of the bid for specialist school science status.
36. The education support department's links with the main feed primary schools are very strong. Learning support assistants manage the cognitive abilities tests testing of Year 6 pupils and establish a sound baseline of information from which the education support department can work when pupils transfer to Huxlow School. The education support department maintains very good links with parents and has an open-door policy for them. Parents' views are sought for individual education plan targets and they make a valued contribution to the annual reviews of their child's statement. The education support department has very strong links with the local authority 'Step Forward' initiative for vulnerable pupils at risk of inclusion. Huxlow pupils on the Step Forward programme are encouraged and given time in the school to study for one or more GCSE

examinations. Connexions staff organise and manage a residential course for the more vulnerable older pupils with emotional and behavioural problems. The outdoor pursuits and social activities that take place there help pupils with their social communication skills and interpersonal relationships. Other agencies and services, including local sports clubs, offer educational packages and facilities for pupils with special educational needs.

Sixth form

37. The good links developed with all areas of the community in the main school are continued into the sixth form. Good opportunities are found to use external resources and gain awareness of local industry and business. The consortium provides the opportunity for close liaison with the partner schools. Good information is provided for parents, with the issue of a clear prospectus, post-16 information evenings and separate opportunities to meet form tutors and subject teachers. Residential trips, higher education conferences, and a study skills conference are organised to support all students from the four schools involved.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall leadership and management are **very good**. Governance is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent vision and sense of purpose are projected by the headteacher.
- There is very good planning and support for teachers.
- Very effective central management systems are developed to promote monitoring of performance of pupils and set targets for improvement.
- The school makes excellent commitment to being inclusive for all pupils and there is equality of opportunity.
- Governors have not ensured the school provides a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

38. The overall leadership of the headteacher and senior management team is very good. They have a clear vision for the future development of the school. The headteacher shows an outstanding sense of purpose and determination to raise achievement and the quality of education for all pupils. The team maintain a high profile around the school, provide very clear guidelines and support for teachers, and set an excellent example to other staff. There is a very strong commitment to the inclusive nature of the school and pupils are supported at all levels to achieve well as individuals. Heads of department are inspired to pursue ambitious targets in standards and teaching, and most demonstrate good or very good leadership. The leadership in science has proven to be particularly effective.
39. Overall management of the school is very good. Senior managers play a strong central role and provide a high level of information, support and training. They take a very active part in the monitoring of teaching. Strategic planning is a good feature in the departmental management and, using very detailed analyses of performance data provided by the senior management team, heads of department evaluate the curriculum and track achievement of pupils well. The extent to which departments proactively monitor and evaluate teaching and learning is inconsistent between departments and in general there is a need to develop the role of the middle manager in the school.
40. The strong leadership and management have had a significant impact on school improvement and raising of pupils' and students' achievement. Staff appointments are very carefully considered to ensure high quality teachers are selected. The school has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to providing opportunities for all and is very inclusive. Often pupils who have been excluded from other establishments have been given a chance for a new start and the outcome has been very successful.
41. In many respects, governors are effective in their role and their overall understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses is good. They give good support, and increasingly contribute more proactively to strategic planning.
42. Financial planning is effective, and development plans are clear in terms of cost. Financial management is good, although the school has in the past been granted a licensed deficit budget. This has been reduced in the most recent year. Spending is carefully monitored and best value principles are applied well in day-to-day accounting. Heads of department are kept well informed through very reliable systems. The most recent auditor's report indicated secure procedures in the

accounting process. The school is bidding to become a specialist science college and has been proactive in securing additional funding from a partnership bid. The school's calculations of income and staffing costs demonstrate that the sixth form is cost effective, a situation greatly helped by the shared consortium teaching arrangements.

43. The special educational needs co-ordinator gives exemplary leadership to the educational support centre. She benefits from valuable clerical and management support and a team of learning support assistants who are well qualified and strongly committed to their work. In-service training is readily available to learning support assistants and their work is monitored through feedback from lessons and from departmental staff. Formal and informal meetings are held to exchange views and information and to improve practice within the department.
44. The school has adopted proactive approaches to staff recruitment to combat recruitment difficulties. The Graduate Recruitment Training Programme is being actively used to recruit and train effective teachers to fill vacancies. The overall quality of non-teaching staff is very good; learning support assistants provide much skilled support for pupils in mainstream lessons. Performance management is in place and well documented; it is linked to staff development and training. Positive action needs to be taken to enhance the role of middle managers and provide them with quality training and opportunities to show initiative and develop their role. Initial Teacher Training partnerships provide good opportunities in school for training. Induction of newly appointed staff is good; induction of newly qualified teachers is a good feature of management.

Sixth form

45. The sixth form, whilst being an equal partner in the consortium of sixth forms of four schools, benefits from the very good leadership of the school as a whole. There is an active head of sixth form in each school who works closely with colleagues in the other schools and manages the internal support and administrative arrangements. A consortium bursar effectively oversees the financial arrangements. The sixth form is cost effective since the resources are efficiently utilised to provide viable group sizes.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	2,220,580
Total expenditure	2,316,032
Expenditure per pupil	3,324

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	15,070
Balance carried forward to the next	-80,382

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching ensures good achievement overall compared with prior attainment.
- The newly appointed head of department has developed a clear plan for improvement of the subject.
- A reluctance to read independently, to take on more responsibility for their own learning, and to participate more in discussion, is slowing the progress of some average attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Schemes of work require further development to ensure that all teachers plan to build effectively on what pupils can do and need to do to improve over time.
- There is not enough time for the head of department to observe lessons or to monitor pupils' progress towards meeting their targets.

Commentary

46. Standards in English are average. Attainment in national tests at the end of Year 9 up to and including 2002 has been below average. There has been a clear trend of improvement over the last three years and the proportion of pupils attaining average and above average levels in 2003 increased. Standards of work seen are average. Considering that pupils enter the school with well below average levels of literacy this indicates good achievement by Year 9 by all pupils, including those with special educational needs.
47. Attainment in GCSE English is more varied and there is no clear trend of improvement. Results for GCSE English in 2002 were in line with national averages; results for English literature were below average. However, results in GCSE English declined in 2003. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are average. Based on prior attainment, pupils' achievement overall is good. The achievement of high attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs is very good. The achievement of some average attaining pupils is no more than satisfactory. Although they can read with some understanding they are reluctant readers and do not read widely. Their speaking skills are poorly developed and they rarely give extended explanations or engage in constructive, sustained discussion. There is some variation between the achievement of boys and girls but there is no consistent pattern to this.
48. The quality of teaching and learning is good with some examples of very good or excellent lessons. Strengths include very good planning and very well structured lessons where pupils' attention is quickly focused through lively starter activities and where learning is extended through a variety of groupings, tasks and learning styles. Teachers stimulate interest and learning by adopting a range of strategies including the use of music, movement and role-play and by encouraging pupils to visualise what they have read. There is very good support for pupils' literacy development in Years 7 to 9. Teaching assistants are very well deployed so that classes can be organised into smaller groups, each with adult support. Activities such as the use of

spelling, reading and writing programmes are well planned to match pupils' identified needs. Learning is brisk and purposeful and pupils are able to evaluate their own progress. Pupils in all years learn to plan, organise and extend their writing through the provision of useful specialist techniques.

49. Where teaching is less effective in Years 7 to 9, some pupils need more guidance with a piece of writing. Although writing is demonstrated to the whole class, some less confident pupils need more support to get started. Despite teachers' best efforts, some Year 10 and Year 11 pupils make slow progress with their learning because they show a reluctance to read, make their own notes or participate constructively in class discussion. Others need frequent reassurance.
50. The newly appointed head of department understands the strengths and weaknesses within the subject and has a clear vision and plan for improvement. She is aware of the need to develop schemes of work that ensure that all teachers build on pupils' previous attainment, knowledge and understanding, and that provide more opportunities for the use of ICT. There is also a need to check that all teachers are setting appropriate targets and ensuring that pupils are able to meet these. There has already been some good evaluation of pupils' work but the head of department has insufficient time to observe teaching. Leadership of the department is good and management is satisfactory. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Although there has been some variation in the quality of teaching in the past, a strong English teaching team now has the potential to raise standards further.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

51. Pupils' language and literacy skills are below average. Although the school provides good support for developing reading, writing, spelling and vocabulary there is not enough support for developing pupils' speaking skills in most subjects. Although there are some exceptions in drama, English, ICT and music lessons, there are few planned opportunities or expectations of pupils to rehearse ideas orally, participate in sustained discussion, or give extended explanations and oral presentations.
52. The school provides very good opportunities for developing literacy skills. Pupils who have difficulties with reading and writing are supported very well through recovery programmes focusing on specific reading, writing and spelling needs. Key vocabulary is reinforced in all subjects; writing structure is used to help develop and extend pupils' writing, and different subjects take responsibility for teaching the forms of writing most used in their area. Pupils are gaining the basic skills in the language but they are not always given enough opportunities to use them.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Challenging and enthusiastic teaching results in high achievement.
- Pupils' attitudes to language learning are very positive.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Assessment is used very effectively to motivate pupils.
- Lack of software impedes the development of ICT

53. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' level of attainment in French in Years 9 is broadly average and pupils achieve very well. In Year 11, attainment is average in French and Spanish. Teachers build on pupils' attainment, and pupils achieve well. Results in Spanish in 2002 were at the national average – an improvement on 2000. In 2003, results in Spanish for higher attaining pupils were above the national average, whilst results in French for the remaining average and lower attaining pupils were below average.
54. Pupils' understanding of the foreign language is generally good, because teachers use it well in the classroom and pupils undertake regular listening exercises. Pronunciation varies between satisfactory and good. In their written work, pupils display a sound knowledge of the relevant vocabulary. The early introduction of the perfect tense in Year 8 enables pupils to develop and consolidate it over two years. Over time, pupils acquire vocabulary, constructions and opinions: they are guided carefully and thoroughly through all points of grammar. Preparation for GCSE is good.
55. Teaching and learning overall in Years 7 to 11 are very good, although opportunities are not always taken to develop oral skills in Years 10 and 11. Pupils' attitudes are very positive. Teaching is generally challenging and enthusiastic: it engages pupils and helps them to maintain their concentration, and pupils are productive. Teachers have high standards and expectations. Good planning ensures that pupils experience a variety of activities and skills. Reading aloud helps pupils to develop their oral skills, but there are too few opportunities for pupils to ask and answer questions in pairs. Regular tests make pupils think; effective questioning keeps them alert. Resources are used well. Written work is marked regularly and corrected in detail, with very helpful comments; too few pupils, however, redraft work or complete corrections to improve accuracy. Relationships are very good.
56. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers work well as a team. Assessment is used very effectively to set targets, motivate pupils and monitor progress. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The lack of software is impeding the development of ICT, and pupils have no regular contact with native speakers.

Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, based on very good lesson planning, so pupils learn well.
- Attitudes of pupils are very good, shown by their neat well-presented work.
- Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good considering their attainment on entry to the school in Year 7.
- The use of computers in the teaching of mathematics is underdeveloped.

Commentary

57. In 2002, test results at the end of Year 9 matched the national average. Performance was better than that of English but not as good as science. In comparison with similar schools based on attainment on entry to the school, performance was well above average. The trend is in line with the national trend. Standards rose significantly in 2003. In the 2002 GCSE the number of pupils with grades A*-C was average in comparison with all schools. The number of pupils with grades A*-G was above average as most of Year 11 pupils were entered and all of them earned a grade. Results were similar in 2003 to those of 2002.

58. Standards seen in the inspection are above average in Year 9 and a further improvement on the results of 2003. Pupils enter the school below average in mathematics and their achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good. High attaining pupils' work in trigonometry shows understanding because problems are drawn accurately and calculations are correctly carried out. Average attaining pupils' work on percentages is neat and accurate. Lower attaining pupils have not yet mastered all of their tables, but they can explain and carry out basic arithmetical operations. Overall standards seen in Year 11 are broadly average. Knowledge and understanding of essential ideas are very clearly consolidated and in this respect pupils continue to achieve very well. Older pupils on the higher level GCSE course have an extensive knowledge of trigonometry. Average attaining pupils are improving their algebraic skills through extended practice. Lower attaining pupils complete the course and earn a grade. Standards through the school are continuing to rise in response to the very good teaching and the very good attitudes pupils have to their work, usually neat and accurate. Pupils behave very well.
59. The very good teaching is founded on very good lesson planning seen in every lesson. Not only do lessons have good, crisp beginnings and endings, but also detailed timings for the development of learning in the rest of the lesson. So time is used well, and good teaching is almost certainly guaranteed by this lesson structure. The quality of teaching seen in the inspection was never less than good. At times the very structure prevented a higher quality of teaching, when the answers to questions needed following up 'there and then', for example. Teaching was very good in some lessons, however, as when a good introduction was developed to enhance understanding by extended oral contributions from pupils. Teaching was occasionally excellent, when such discussions focused on the different ways of solving problems and the ideas pupils put forward.
60. The department has new staff leading it this term. Leadership is good. It says much for the overall good management that the transition has gone well. The teachers in the department are settling in to work well as a team. National Curriculum requirements are met but those aspects of the curriculum requiring the use of computers are underdeveloped. The use of computers in teaching is limited. Calculators are used effectively.
61. Since the last inspection standards have improved and teaching has improved. Attention to pupils with special needs has improved, as support for them is very good now. Assessment procedures have improved and the new leadership in the department is beginning to improve them still further. The use of computers is not as well integrated into the teaching as it was at the last inspection. Overall improvement since the last inspection is good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

62. Overall standards of mathematics across the curriculum are average. Strengths are in design and technology and geography. There is a wide variety of good graph work in geography. Co-ordinates are used well and data collection is good. In design and technology pupils are good at estimating ingredients and measuring accurately. In science there are high standards of graphical skill but pupils have some difficulty with their calculations. Spatial awareness is less well developed as there are few example of working drawings in design and technology and there is no three-dimensional work in art. There are appropriate policies in place but in some subjects the administration needs tightening up.

Science

Provision in science is **excellent**.

Main strengths

- Standards have continued to rise at a faster rate than the national rate, resulting in excellent achievement.
- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and ensure that each pupil is presented with challenging work.
- Assessment procedures are used well to inform both teachers and pupils of the progress made and provide realistic but challenging targets.
- Strong leadership and management provide the structure for success and the teachers respond with dedicated hard work.

Commentary

63. The results in the national tests for Year 9 in 2002 were above average. The results were very high compared to the results of schools with similar prior attainment of pupils on entry to the school. GCSE examination results for Year 11 in 2002 were well above the national average and very high compared with schools with a similar range of prior attainment in Year 9. Examination results for Year 11 in 2003 are even higher than in the previous year. Results are rising faster than national averages with no significant difference in those of boys and girls.
64. Achievement is excellent for all pupils. They make excellent progress in their knowledge and understanding of scientific facts, and their practical and investigative skills are well developed. Setting arrangements in Years 8 to 11 allow for lower attaining pupils to be taught in relatively small groups, supported well by learning support assistants. Consequently there is no difference in the achievement of pupils with special educational needs. Very high attaining pupils are set more demanding tasks and also make excellent progress.
65. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, and is an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers expect high standards from their pupils and produce challenging work for pupils of all abilities. Lessons are structured well, a wide range of techniques is employed and lessons are delivered at a brisk pace. ICT is used to consolidate learning before the end of module tests and a computer-controlled digital projector enables the teacher to interact with the presentation. Practical activities are carried out at every opportunity and encourage an interest in science. Pupils respond well, co-operate fully and work well with teachers and each other. This combination of very good teaching, high challenge and pupil interest makes a significant contribution to the excellent achievement. Equally important to the excellent achievement in science is the department's use of very specific targets set for pupils and rewards gained in reaching them.
66. Rigorous assessment, including pupils' self-assessment in their notebooks, informs pupils of their progress and provides an individual target for each test. Continued success is rewarded by the science merit scheme. Assessment and encouragement are key features in the high standards of achievement.
67. Leadership is excellent and management is very good. Clear educational vision and effective strategic planning also make significant contributions to success. The curriculum is under constant review and environmental science has been introduced this year in Year 10. The quality of learning is constantly assessed but formal monitoring of teaching is not sufficiently rigorous. ICT is used effectively and further development is planned. The improved accommodation since the last inspection provides for a rich mixture of theory, pupil practical work and teacher demonstration assisting the pace of pupil learning. Overall the improvement in science is outstanding and reflected by the great increase in examination success.

Information and communication technology

Provision in ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

In the subject itself:

- Teaching is very good. Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 and standards are above average.

- Pupils know what they have to do to improve because assessment is good.
- Improvement since the last inspection is good because leadership is good.

Across the curriculum:

- Standards are average as some subjects lack appropriate equipment and use has declined.
- Monitoring has not identified the barriers to learning in some subjects, art and design, design and technology and music for example.

Commentary

68. The current standards in Years 9 are above average, which represents very good achievement by pupils who had below average levels of attainment when they entered the school. Inspection evidence suggests teacher assessments of average standards in 2002 were an underestimate. A recent innovation in the curriculum was the entry of one group of pupils for the GCSE short course in ICT at the end of Year 9 in 2003. All earned a grade, with higher attaining pupils at Grade C. GCSE results in 2002 were average for the number of pupils at Grades A*-C. Current standards in Year 11 are above average in the main course, representing very good achievement given pupils' attainment at the start of it. There is very good support for pupils with special needs from the learning support assistants and the technician, so these pupils achieve as well as others do.
69. The very good teaching in Year 10 and 11 promotes very good learning, based on very good subject expertise and lesson planning. The central resources are used very well. Pupils use the computers with confidence. The younger pupils are good at importing texts and pictures and become increasingly confident in handling spreadsheets. The older pupils' coursework is good. They are good at forming judgements on the quality of it, knowing how to improve because of the good assessments and helpful advice in the teaching. The teaching engages pupils very well in their work through effective teaching methods, helped by the very good attitudes of the pupils themselves.
70. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The GCSE course has been established since the last inspection and standards at the end of Year 11 have improved as a result. The curriculum satisfies the demands of the National Curriculum now. Teaching continues to be very good. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory but it was good in the last inspection so use has declined since then. Leadership is good in the subject as the innovative approach to standards continues to extend the recent success at the end of Year 9 at GCSE into higher standards at the end of Year 11.

ICT across the curriculum

71. The lack of monitoring of ICT across the curriculum has led to a decline in good practice since the last inspection. In design and technology, for example, there are only four computers. Provision for computer-aided design is poor. There are no computers at all in food. Interactive whiteboards are lacking across the school. The result is a barrier to learning, reflected also in art and design and music. In contrast, the science department has an effective revision programme even though hardware is in short supply. The special educational needs department has very good provision of computers that enables the teaching staff to deliver an effective individual learning programme for pupils. The curriculum satisfies the National Curriculum; teaching and standards are satisfactory.

HUMANITIES

Geography

The provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have risen steadily for three years, leading to good pupil achievement.
- Teachers have high expectations and pupils are challenged by their work, which leads to good or very good learning in lessons.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunities for discussion in lessons and this limits their progress as independent learners.
- The lack of fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 limits skills' development and the pupils' understanding of their environment.

Commentary

72. Standards in Years 9 have risen and are broadly average. Compared to pupils' attainment on entry this is good achievement. All pupils develop good map, graph and atlas skills and higher attaining pupils produce some very good descriptive writing about world problems, indicating very good understanding. Lower attaining pupils have satisfactory factual knowledge but written work is often brief and lacks detail.
73. Results for GCSE examinations for Year 11 were above average for both boys and girls in 2002. This is good achievement compared to standards in Year 9. In the work seen during inspection standards are above average, representing continued good achievement. Higher attaining pupils have very good numeracy and analytical skills and use geographical terms with confidence. Lower attaining pupils have good basic graph skills and knowledge of facts but sometimes confuse geographical terms. In examination fieldwork higher attaining pupils show good research skills, and use data to produce very good evidence-based reports with clearly developed conclusions. Lower attaining pupils collect less data and some reports lack the evidence to support their decisions.
74. Teaching overall is very good, leading to very good learning in most lessons. Lessons are well planned with varied, good resources to support and motivate pupils. Lower attaining pupils are supported by clearly printed and well-planned worksheets, and extension work is provided for the higher attaining pupils in all lessons. In some lessons boys dominate oral work and this limits the active participation of girls. In most lessons oral work is brief, which limits the ability of pupils to develop their own understanding. The use of very good starter exercises in lessons includes laminated map outlines, video clips, graphs and photographs to stimulate and inspire pupils. This in turn leads to very good attitudes to learning and good concentration in lessons. Poor literary skills in lower sets present a barrier to raising achievement.
75. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement. Resources have improved, development planning is now good and there is good use of assessment and target setting to promote pupils' progress. There is still insufficient development of pupils' speaking skills and of self-assessment for pupils. Leadership is good and committed to maintaining rising standards in the subject. Overall management of the department is satisfactory.

History

The provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good.
- GCSE results are still well below national averages.
- Good support is provided for pupils with special educational needs.
- Opportunities for independent learning are too limited.
- Poor literacy restricts attainment of some pupils.
- Good leadership and management have raised the subject's profile.

Commentary

76. Pupils enter the school with attainment levels which are below national averages. In particular low standards of literacy are found and this is a barrier to learning for many pupils, as is reflected in the Year 9 teacher assessments and Year 11 GCSE results. In 2002 the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C was well below the national average. The relative attainment of boys and girls has fluctuated in recent years, although contrary to the national picture, in 2003 boys did better than girls overall and accounted for all the higher grade passes. Standards of work seen in the current Year 11 are now broadly average and overall these pupils are achieving well as a result of improved teacher's planning, higher expectations and classroom management. Pupils select, organise and deploy relevant information logically, although many routinely omit the dates of historical events and lack confidence in analysing and evaluating sources. In oral work, higher attaining pupils explain and substantiate their findings convincingly, but many are reluctant to answer at any length.
77. By the end of Year 9 standards of work seen are average, which reflects good achievement. Many pupils complete a good quantity of written work in acquiring a knowledge and understanding of selected historical topics and issues, but for others poor literacy skills restrict their attainment.
78. Pupils learn well because teachers plan their lessons very effectively in accordance with the Key Stage 3 Strategy, monitor pupils' attention closely and manage their classes very skilfully. Teachers ensure tasks are well matched to different ability levels and, together with learning support assistants, help pupils with special educational needs very well, resulting in good, and often very good, progress. Teachers have a secure command of their subject and produce a wealth of resource material to support pupils' studies although this can result in a 'dependency culture' amongst some pupils. Additionally, many lessons seen followed a similar format resulting in some missed opportunities to foster the independent and confident learning necessary for high grades at GCSE. Reliance upon photocopied sheets and shared textbooks in some lessons was an additional hindrance.
79. The subject is well led and managed by an energetic and hard-working head of department, who has succeeded in raising its profile, as may be demonstrated by the increased numbers opting for it at GCSE level. There is good support for non-specialist teachers and close collaboration within the department, which, combined with pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes, lead to effective classroom relationships. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Pupils' enquiry skills have improved but evaluation remains weak. Teaching and learning have improved, but not enough focus is put on targets for examination success, which remains too low.

Religious education

The overall provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The general teaching and learning are good.
- There is no specialist religious education teacher, which limits the wider expertise and knowledge of the subject.
- The head of department demonstrates a high level of commitment, which is replicated by other teachers.
- The development of schemes of work and planning is good.
- There is a lack of non-standard teaching materials that could be used to provide deeper understanding.

- Good use is made of assessment materials.

Commentary

80. The standards of work produced in Year 11 were below average in GCSE examinations in 2002, although these have varied considerably in the last four years. Overall standards in Year 9 and Year 11, for example knowledge and understanding of ideas in religious education by the majority of pupils, are broadly average. The standards in Year 9 meet the requirements of the Northamptonshire Agreed Syllabus. There are few significant differences in attainment between boys and girls although the girls generally present their work better. Throughout every year group standards are limited by the time allocated to the subject. The standards are, however, promoted by good assessment materials, which enable pupils to critically review their work and set standards to improve it. Overall achievement of pupils is good from Year 7 to 9, and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11.
81. The quality of teaching is consistently good. The excellent, systematic planning enables the non-specialist religious education teachers to be effective and generate a good level of basic understanding amongst pupils but there is a lack of specialist religious education teachers who can inject wider and deeper detailed knowledge, which gives depth and vitality to the studies. Major strengths are the good pupil attitudes, the orderly teaching and the quality of the contributions made by the learning support assistants amongst pupils who have special educational needs. The pupils show that they have the ability and imagination to write very good poems but too often their work is confined to short oral questions and comprehension exercises. There are limited opportunities for independent learning.
82. The head of department provides good leadership and management. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff have a secure command of subject knowledge.
- Good quality schemes of work and lesson planning lead to lessons with pace and challenge.
- Pupils show keen interest in the subject and positive attitudes to work.
- Standards have improved significantly at GCSE.
- Inadequate resources and unsatisfactory accommodation are a barrier to learning.
- ICT provision is poor and computer-aided design facilities are inadequate.

Commentary

83. By Year 9, standards are broadly average and achievement from Year 7 is good, from a low base on entry. Pupils have a secure grasp of the design process and achieve well. Results in GCSE 2002 were just below national averages. Standards in work seen in Year 11 are average. This represents broadly satisfactory achievement from Year 9 to 11. Whilst the results in 2002 reveal underperformance by girls, 2003 GCSE results reveal no significant differences. GCSE results compare well with other subjects in school. Weak skills in graphics hinder all stages of solving design problems. Inadequate supply of tools and equipment is a marked barrier to learning; it is particularly noticeable in the work from more able GCSE pupils. In Years 7 to 11, poor ICT provision leads to a lack of refinement and sophistication to all aspects of design thinking, including testing and presentation.

84. Curriculum time in Years 7 to 9 allows pupils to gain relevant technological experiences in material areas; time for coverage of systems and control is too limited. Units of work are well thought out and provide quality technological experiences. Structured approaches to computer-aided design and manufacture need to be urgently deployed for all pupils. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the extension of thinking skills and initiative to enable more effective transfer of knowledge and understanding to new design situations.
85. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Learning is less effective in Years 10 and 11. Lack of ICT provision limits more varied teaching strategies to be deployed for all groups of pupils. Some basic graphical skills are not being well enough developed by older pupils. Teaching in textiles is good, often very good. Product design analysis teaching is often inspiring. Thorough lesson planning provides the basis for well thought out lessons with pace and challenge. A hard-working, talented core staff team demonstrate a secure command of their subject.
86. Leadership is good in the sense that a clear vision is established with a strong sense of direction. Also, while recent staffing difficulties have been unsettling, staff remain committed to working as a team. Management is satisfactory. There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning. There are weaknesses in course structures although day-to-day lesson planning is good. Accommodation and resource problems remain as barriers to learning. Most health and safety issues are monitored. Since the last inspection, when aspects of the curriculum in design and technology were unsatisfactory, improvement is good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design, and music were inspected in full and drama was sampled.

Drama

87. Two drama lessons were sampled: one in Year 8 and one in Year 10. Standards in both were average. Because both lessons were encouraging pupils to plan for performances later within the unit of work, there was no opportunity to observe physical performance skills. In both lessons pupils collaborated very well in pairs or small groups, listening carefully to each other and showing good negotiation skills. They presented ideas clearly and confidently: in Year 8 on how they would develop the role of a character in a murder mystery; in Year 10 on how they would stage a drama on the theme of war. Pupils' achievement in Year 8 was very good because all pupils participated enthusiastically including those with special educational needs. In Year 10 achievement was satisfactory. Pupils rose to a difficult challenge but needed to be shown a range of types of stage sets and designs to inform their planning. Teaching overall was good and led to purposeful, imaginative discussion. Teachers made very good use of initial stimuli such as pictures of *Cluedo* characters as a basis for developing roles, and music evoking the horrors of war.
88. There are good opportunities for drama within expressive arts and schemes of work ensure progressive development of skills, knowledge and understanding. Because the subject contributes significantly to developing pupils' speaking and social skills, all pupils in Years 7 and 9 would benefit from more regular drama lessons.

Art and design

The provision in art is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in GCSE examinations are very low, because of the disruption in the department caused by low expectations and poor leadership in recent years.
- The newly arrived head of department shows very good leadership and has high standards and expectations of pupils. He is an excellent role model for pupils and colleagues.
- The very good teaching in Years 7 to 9 is enabling standards to recover and pupils to take a fresh interest in art as a worthwhile subject.
- Pupils are positive about their work, behave well and are pleased with their current achievements.
- The curriculum lacks both breadth and balance. No three-dimensional work or computer-aided art is undertaken.
- The accommodation, although spacious, is dreary and uninspiring.

Commentary

89. The department has been through a very difficult and disruptive period during which standards have spiralled downwards to the point where they are far lower than in any other subject. Standards in Year 9 are well below expectations for the age. Results in GCSE examinations in 2002 were well below national average and achievement has been unsatisfactory.
90. The newly arrived head of department is a strong and capable teacher whose high standards and expectations of work and behaviour have already stamped themselves on classes in all years. His leadership is very good. As a result, standards are rising perceptibly, week on week, and pupils are showing commitment to their work and pleasure in their achievements. Target grades for the GCSE examination in 2004 indicate a firm upward trend, which is set to continue as expectations are met and pupils continue to learn from the good teaching evident during the inspection. The positive attitudes of pupils and their very good response to the subject discipline support the overall rising trends in the department. Management of the department is developing and currently it is good, but there is insufficient time to address all deficiencies.
91. The curriculum lacks breadth and balance. This has been planned at this early stage so that pupils can focus on the basic art skills that they have failed to cover in previous years. The focus on line, tone, texture and surface are feeding into other curriculum aspects as they are introduced in a planned way. A computer is almost ready for use and will be the foundation for the development of digital art. Resources in this curriculum area are currently unsatisfactory. The accommodation, although spacious, is drab and uninspiring, but on the agenda for improvement.
92. Overall improvement in standards and teaching since last inspection is good, but the capacity to improve further is considerable.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently good teaching enables pupils to achieve well in all years.
- GCSE results are broadly average and take-up is above average, due to the flexibility of timetabled and out-of-hours courses.
- The schemes of work, whilst being revised, do not provide enough information for progression and cross-school initiatives.
- Instrumental and singing teachers are well used in the department, enhancing extra-curricular provision and providing tuition to above average numbers of pupils.

- Recording facilities to support composing tasks are inadequate.

Commentary

93. Pupils have two routes to taking GCSE: the two-year timetabled course in Years 10 and 11, and a one-year out-of-hours course. This enables an above average proportion of pupils to study music to GCSE. Pupils' work in both Year 9 and in Year 11 is below average, but pupils make good progress, achieving well at both stages. By Year 9 they can identify mood and content well in music they hear, use appropriate musical vocabulary and combine elementary harmony and melody in composition and performance. In Year 11 practical skills vary widely, but most pupils write good commentaries on their own work and on that of recognised musicians. Girls show a greater interest than boys in optional musical activities, but the Year 10 GCSE group is well balanced. Very good support by teachers and assistants ensures that pupils with special needs achieve as well as others. Talented pupils, while not formally identified, extend their learning through instrumental or singing tuition and performing in extra-curricular ensembles and school productions. They also achieve well.
94. Teaching is good in all years. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour extremely well, building a very positive climate for learning and very good relations. Good planning, incorporating much very well led discussion, develops key vocabulary and engages pupils' interest in the subject. Their attitudes are good. In some practical lessons there is insufficient musical challenge. The good units of work of Years 7 to 9 are ineffectively sequenced and, especially when music is part of expressive arts in Year 9, some units are musically undemanding. Cross-school issues, such as citizenship and strategies to stretch the talented, are not securely embedded in the schemes of work.
95. Work is assessed well and, for GCSE compositions, pupils draft and re-draft work in the light of comment. Self-assessment, linked to units of work, helps pupils to understand their progress and teachers to plan. The department is very well led and well managed. It has made good improvement since the last inspection, with a growth in GCSE numbers and the option to proceed to A-level, better time allocation, and a better stock of instruments. However, recording facilities to develop composition individually and other ICT equipment are inadequate, especially for the demands of GCSE.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, enabling pupils to achieve well. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to evaluate their own performance or that of others.
- Pupils show good attitudes to their learning, although weaknesses are evident in the learning of some examination pupils.
- There are not enough opportunities for the head of department to monitor the quality of teaching and learning.
- The range of learning opportunities provided, including extra-curricular activities and links with sports clubs in the community, is good.
- The accommodation provided for the subject is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

96. By the end of Years 9 and 11 standards are in line with those expected and pupils achieve well. Improvement since the time of the last inspection is good. The highest standards are evident in Years 7 to 9 in dance and football. High standards are also seen in Years 10 and 11 in badminton and football. In these activities and in rugby, standards are improving rapidly. This is because the quality of teaching is good. Planning is a key strength. Teachers provide pupils with good opportunities to acquire and apply skills.
97. Arrangements to assess pupils' attainment and progress are good and teachers make accurate assessments that they share with pupils. Teachers also provide pupils with helpful advice about what they need to do to improve. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own performance and that of others. This also means that opportunities for pupils to use their speaking and listening abilities are missed.
98. Examination courses at GCSE level, have been reintroduced in September 2003, after a gap of several years. This has improved the range of learning opportunities available to pupils. However, some GCSE pupils do not apply themselves sufficiently well to their learning. This is currently restricting the progress they are able to make.
99. Pupils achieve well as a result of good teaching. The accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory and is preventing pupils from achieving very well. For example, there is no indoor space large enough to accommodate a full game of basketball. Due to very dry weather and poor maintenance, much of the field cannot be used for teaching games.
100. In many ways, for example in the clarity of vision, teamwork and day-to-day organisation, the leadership and management of the department are good. However, there is virtually no rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning by the head of department.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

101. The school has a good programme for personal, social and health education. It is delivered in discrete topics and the good achievement and average standards implied in the previous inspection report have been maintained. Discussion work is, however, still limited and an area for improvement. There is an effective range of voluntary activities, which supplement the provision, including a professionally run health advice clinic and opportunity to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. In Years 10 and 11, there is also good support given in preparing pupils for careers. Only citizenship was inspected in detail, but some lessons seen involved aspects of both programmes.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has only recently completed an audit of citizenship and has yet to establish a thorough scheme for delivery and assessment of the subject.
- Although teaching in citizenship lessons is satisfactory, learning and commitment to the subject are limited by insufficient discussion of themes and lack of up-to-date materials.
- The school provides a range of stimulating events and opportunities in citizenship.
- The new co-ordinator for citizenship is aware of the demands of the subject and has a very good model for development in that offered by the sixth form consortium.

Commentary

102. Due to the long-term illness of the former co-ordinator, the introduction of citizenship has been slower than in most schools. There is a good range of citizenship activities already in place across the full range of subjects, including personal, social and health education. In both Year 9 and Year 11 standards are below the expected level for the subject, representing satisfactory achievement at both levels. By Year 11 pupils are better able to discuss and reflect upon the role of the responsible citizen, as in their ability to relate 1960s student protests to contemporary student protest movements.
103. Teaching of citizenship is satisfactory. Occasionally lessons are very good. Here they are characterised by the strength of their planning, preparing topics through focused homework so that pupils are able to discuss and make judgements on moral issues, for example, those surrounding crime and punishment. Other lessons do not engage pupils in discussion and working with out-dated factual information does little to encourage pupils to see the contemporary relevance of topics. The library has insufficient books on civic issues to promote well-balanced research.
104. Overall, pupils' attitudes and their learning are satisfactory, but the lack of a system of assessment in citizenship means that pupils have neither a sense of continuity nor a clear idea of how they can improve.
105. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. There is no monitoring of lessons to inform teaching and development of the subject. However, the new co-ordinator has the will to redress weaknesses and build on strengths. The subject can benefit from collaboration with the sixth form citizenship providers. A growing range of stimulating activities and events enable pupils to become more responsible citizens. Most stimulating are the school council which is fed by year group councils and develops into an area schools' council, activities within expressive arts with pensioners and the wider community, the lecture series which has included visits from prisoners to MPs, and the school newspaper.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

106. In the inspection, five 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.
107. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

Level 3 GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
General studies	9	100	78.6	22.2	25.7	37.8	27.4
Mathematics	5	60.0	74.2	0.0	34.3	12.0	18.7

Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E	% gaining grades A-B	Average point score
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		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and social care VCE	6	100	90.1	0.0	16.3	50.0	62.5
Mathematics	1	0.0	*	0.0	*		
Chemistry	3	100.0	*	33.3	*		
History	0		*		*		
Design and technology	2	100.0	*	50.0	*		
English literature	5	100.0	*	0.0	*		

*In most courses the numbers of pupils entered were too small to enable meaningful comparisons. School figures only are given for subjects focused on during this inspection.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision for English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students benefit from the range of courses made available through the consortium organisation.
- Good teaching and the marking of work are leading to good achievement.
- There is a need to develop more independent study and wider reading.
- There could be more rigorous analysis of examination results to decide how more students could attain the highest grades.
- Low attaining students not taking A-level courses need to be guided towards more appropriate courses.

Commentary

108. Only a small number of students opt for AS and Advanced level English courses and in some years no students from Huxlow choose these courses. In 2001 attainment in English literature at A2 was below average: all seven students attained GCE A-level A-E grades, but few at the higher levels. Attainment in AS-level English language and literature in 2002 was below average: all students attained grades B to E, few at the higher levels. Based on prior attainment this indicates good achievement for these students. No male students from Huxlow are currently following A-level courses in English. Standards seen in lessons are broadly average. Standards seen in a Year 12 GCSE retake class were well below average; achievement for this group is unsatisfactory and the course is inappropriate with very little chance of success in three months for students whose prior attainment at GCSE is low.

109. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers mark students' work conscientiously and give clear guidance on how to improve. They encourage students to evaluate their own performance and to compare their achievement with the examination assessment criteria. There is clear improvement over time in students' ability to structure a coherent argument and to support it with detailed references. Lessons are well planned and well structured with a good balance between teacher exposition and student activities. For example, after a preliminary reading and discussion of both Dr Johnson's and James Boswell's accounts of their journey to the Western Isles, students were invited to work in pairs to compose a dialogue between Johnson and Boswell. This was an effective way of involving all students and to challenge them to consider the use of eighteenth-century language and to attempt a pastiche. Learning would be more effective if lower attaining

students were encouraged to participate more in whole-class discussion and all students were more prepared to take on more independent study and wider reading outside the lessons.

110. Students following the AS and Advanced level English language and literature course at Huxlow feel well prepared for the examinations. All students in 2002 achieved passes at B to E grades at AS level and a high proportion have continued on to the A Level course in Year 13. Regular communication between teachers and the discussion of teaching and learning and standards are good. There could be a more rigorous analysis of examination results to decide how more students might attain the highest grades.

Spanish

One lesson in Spanish was observed where teaching and learning were both good.

Mathematics

Provision for mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching is good so students learn well.
- The teaching arrangements are efficient.
- Assessment is very helpful to students because they are given good suggestions for improvement.
- Students need to develop more skill in their individual learning to be successful in examinations.

Commentary

111. Students from Huxlow join students from three other schools in a consortium arrangement for their teaching of AS-level mathematics. They study modules in pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. Opportunities exist for them to choose further mathematics modules. Modules in pure mathematics and statistics were inspected in Year 12. There are no students studying A-level mathematics in Year 13. The re-sit GCSE course and the application of number course were also inspected.
112. Of the five students entered for AS-level mathematics in 2002, performance was below average, with three students earning a grade. This was an improvement on the results of 2001. No students were entered in 2003.
113. Standards seen in the inspection are average for students at the start of their AS-level course and their achievement at this early stage is satisfactory. Not all students have adjusted their learning skills to the demands of the course. In pure mathematics, algebra develops well from the GCSE higher level course. Lessons move at a good pace. In statistics, achievement is satisfactory as students learn new ways of displaying data.
114. The teaching is good and students learn well. The subject expertise of the teachers is good, so subject matter is explained clearly and well with good use of mathematical language. The use of a computer-controlled screen in the teaching of pure mathematics enhances the quality of learning, as no time is lost in routine preparatory work. The marking of students' work is very good, focusing on students' errors and suggestions for improvement. Discussion between the teacher and individual students encourages better private study. In statistics the difference between discrete and continuous data is not yet securely learnt.
115. Leadership and management are good, providing a good A level mathematics curriculum for students from Huxlow. This is helped by the consortium arrangements. Students are enjoying their course. Overall provision for the mainstream A-level and AS courses is good. Provision for the re-sit GCSE students and for those on the application of number course is currently unsatisfactory although students can continue to follow the course after the examination to develop their mathematical skills. Attendance is unsatisfactory. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

SCIENCE

The focus in the inspection was on chemistry. There were no opportunities to sample other sciences.

Chemistry

Overall, the quality of provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teacher has high expectations of the students and ensures that each student undertakes challenging work.
- Assessment procedures are used well to inform both teachers and students of the progress made and to provide realistic but challenging targets.
- Strong leadership and management provide the structure for success.

Commentary

116. As the inspection took place early in the academic year and only Year 12 students study chemistry the evidence base is limited. However, the standard of work seen in notebooks and through two lesson observations suggest that there has been very good progress in this short time. The students have a mature attitude to practical work as they investigate the esterification of alcohols. The theoretical discussion that followed showed a high level of understanding of the reactions involved and they were able to use structural formula. This understanding was brought about largely by the clarity of the explanation and the enthusiasm for the subject. The students share this interest and respond accordingly.
117. Achievement is very good. Students make very good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the nature of simple organic molecules and practical skills are well developed.
118. The quality of the teaching is very good. High standards are expected from the students and work is challenging for students of all abilities. This combination of very good teaching, high challenge and student interest make a significant contribution to the very good achievement. The rigorous assessment system used in the main school forms the basis for assessment in the sixth form.
119. Leadership is excellent and the management is very good. The course is tightly structured and there is a shared commitment to succeed.

HUMANITIES

The focus in the inspection was on history. Psychology was sampled. One lesson in psychology was observed, where teaching and learning were satisfactory.

History

Provision In history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Standards are still below national norms.
- Students are not yet effective independent learners.
- Subject is well managed and led.

- Classroom relationships are good.
- Wide reading is not yet common practice.

Commentary

120. Results in the AS and A-level examinations have been well below average in recent years, but the very small numbers and consortium arrangements invalidate any attempts to draw significant conclusions from the data.
121. Currently only AS history is taught at Huxlow so only Year 12 lessons and work could be inspected. The standards of work seen vary widely but overall were higher than indicated by recent examination results, although still below those expected nationally. In tackling topics such as the causes of the Russian Revolution, students research effectively, interpret sources accurately and come to substantiated conclusions in good quality extended writing. Lower attaining students' notes lack precision and detail and their knowledge and understanding of subject-specific terminology are not yet secure at this relatively early stage of the AS course. In lessons seen, boys were more likely than girls to volunteer answers to questions, but discussion skills were underdeveloped and extended oral contributions rare. Overall achievement in this early part of the course is satisfactory.
122. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and their planning is very thorough and detailed; they mark assignments closely, offering valuable diagnostic comment but do not always correct errors in spelling and grammar in students' notes. Students are inclined to rely too heavily on teacher-produced support materials, which undermines their development as effective independent learners. Evidence of wide reading around the subject and paired and/or group presentations was not immediately obvious during the inspection week although introductory course materials indicated that seminars are scheduled later in the year. Students' attitudes to the subject were clearly positive but were rather passive and acquiescent; few were energetic and proactive in furthering their own learning.
123. The subject is well managed and led. The head of department has raised the profile of the subject and succeeded in attracting a far greater number of candidates than in earlier years although this has led to a shortage of textbooks in some areas of the course. Satisfactory improvement has been sustained since the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work seen at A2 are satisfactory; standards at AS are good.
 - Teaching quality is good, often very good.
 - Students employ structured approaches to analytical thinking.
 - ICT provision falls well short of syllabus requirements and is a barrier to course development and progress.
 - There are inadequate resources and accommodation in resistant material areas.
124. Standards of work seen in recently established courses are above average overall; standards are very well above average at AS-level. In lessons, students are keen to learn and display maturity in their approach to problem solving. They are developing much confidence in their analysis of problems and products. They apply design methodology well to product analysis and consumer

needs. Coursework folders are systematically and thoughtfully developed. Poor ICT resources hold back the development of advanced research skills, analysis, testing and graphical presentation. Overall achievement is satisfactory.

125. Students are well integrated in teaching groups; successful AS enrolment is resulting in lively teaching groups. Male and female students achieve well and make good gains in Year 12. This is a very good basis for the raising and consolidation of standards across both AS and A2. Students display a very good grasp of manufacturing processes and their impact on the environment. Experience of the use of a wide range of material moulding and shaping equipment is too limited.
126. Students in Years 12 and 13 are well motivated, take responsibility for their learning and display an ability to work independently. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Teachers' enthusiasm and encouragement lead students to persevere when faced with difficulties.
127. Overall, teaching is good; lessons are characterised by thoughtful planning and appropriate intellectual challenge. Assessment is used well to inform teaching and provide good guidance for student improvement. Better quality resources and upgrading of accommodation will allow more varied teaching approaches to be deployed; this will lead to further improvements in lesson pace, challenge and students' ability to innovate.
128. Leadership and management of sixth form provision in the subject are very good. The head of subject leads by example and by monitoring teacher and student performance very closely, in line with syllabus requirements.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Music

One lesson in music was observed where teaching and learning were both good.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and social care

One lesson in health and social care was seen, where teaching and learning were both very good.

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	2
How inclusive the school is		1
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		4
Pupils' achievement	4	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		3
Attendance	3	3
Attitudes	3	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	3	2
How well pupils learn	3	2
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3	3
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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