

INSPECTION REPORT

BIDDENHAM UPPER SCHOOL

Bedford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109690

Headteacher: M Berrill

Lead inspector: Mrs C Worthington

Dates of inspection: 6th – 9th October 2003

Inspection number: 263311

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	13 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	819
School address:	Biddenham Turn Bedford
Postcode:	MK40 4AZ
Telephone number:	(01234) 342 521
Fax number:	(01234) 325 646
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Chairman of governors:	Jim Gunther

Dates of previous inspection: 9th – 12th November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Biddenham Upper School is a smaller than average secondary which serves the central and North West areas of Bedford and the surrounding villages. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. There are more girls than boys in all years except Year 9, where numbers are equal. The sixth form comprises 146 pupils. Just over half of all pupils are white British, and about 40 per cent are of Asian origin. About five per cent are from Caribbean or African origin, and about five per cent are children of either refugees or asylum seekers. The percentage of pupils with English as a second language is very high at nearly 50 per cent; 25 pupils are at an early stage of acquiring the language. An average percentage (23.1) of pupils has been identified as having special educational needs, mainly associated with learning disability, emotional and behavioural difficulty. Just over two per cent have statements, which is in line with the national average. Attainment on entry in Year 9 is about average. The mobility of pupils is high because the school has the largest population of refugees and asylum seekers in the county. The school was awarded the Investors in People award in 2002 and the Sportsmark in 2003. It became a specialist sports college in July 2003. Around the time of the last inspection, the school was on the verge of closure.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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11104	Michael Fleming	Lay inspector	
8076	Terry Bendall	Team inspector	Design and technology
1033	Howard Chester	Team inspector	Mathematics
31664	Bridget Clements	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages, English as an additional language (EAL)
31863	Adrian Cornelius	Team inspector	Geography
27226	Richard Cribb	Team inspector	Citizenship, History, Religious education
8240	Elaine Dearmer	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
10060	David Gutmann	Team inspector	Health and social care
32225	Christine Hough	Team inspector	Sixth form Physical education
24453	Gordon Jackson	Team inspector	Science
2746	Roy Lund	Team Inspector	Special educational needs
4757	David Morris	Team inspector	Music
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30648	Brian Skelton	Team inspector	English
15372	Patricia Walker	Team inspector	Sixth form English and History
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an **effective** school, which continues to improve. The number of pupils on roll is rising rapidly. The headteacher gives very good leadership and is well supported by the senior management team and governing body. Standards shown by the National Curriculum tests in Year 9 have risen over the past three years in English, mathematics and science, but GCSE results remain well below average. It is likely that the progress made in Year 9 will be reflected in better GCSE results in the future. The school provides a broad and rich curriculum with notable strengths in performing arts and humanities. Pupils have a good work ethic and there is a harmonious racial mix. Teaching is satisfactory with good features. Subject management is satisfactory and the school gives **sound value for money**. Attainment on entry is not assessed, but appears to be about average.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards shown by National Curriculum test results are above the average of similar schools.
- The school encourages all pupils to be independent learners.
- The sixth form provision is good.
- Pastoral care is good; pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are all good.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good in drama and physical education, and outstanding in dance and music.
- GCSE results are not good enough in English language and mathematics, though they are above average in religious education, French, history and English literature.
- No effective baseline is established for pupils when they enter in Year 9.
- The school does not provide consistently for the needs of pupils who do not speak English at home.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance	compared with:					Key
	all schools			similar schools 2002		
	2000	2001	2002	Prior attainment	Free school meals	
Average total GCSE points score per pupil	D	E	E	E	C	well above average A
Ave points score pupils entered for GCE A/AS levels	n/a	D	n/a	n/a	n/a	above average B average C below average D well below average E

Achievement is satisfactory in Years 9 to 11, and good in the sixth form. Standards are average except in English and mathematics, where they are below average from examination results, but have improved in the current Year 10. No lessons were seen in Year 11. It is not possible to compare standards in the sixth form with national averages because the number of students taking each subject is too small to make meaningful comparisons. Students generally achieve according to their capability. **Pupils' personal standards, attitudes and behaviour are good.** The standards of **spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are also good.** Spirituality is planned into the curriculum in most subjects. Pupils show respect for others, understanding and valuing the diversity of the school community. The school offers many cultural activities, especially in music and dance. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. This is a great improvement due to the school's very good remedial measures. Pupils take their responsibility to be punctual seriously, especially in the absence of periodic bells. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **good**. They enjoy learning.

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

The quality of education provided by the school is good. The quality of teaching and learning is **satisfactory** overall and good in English, history, science, religious education and physical education; it is outstanding in dance. Teaching and learning are **good** in the sixth form.

The curriculum is **good** in quality and range. It is enriched with vocational and work-related subjects and flexible in its ability to cater for all individuals. Extra-curricular provision is very good, especially in the steel bands, which are outstanding. The wide range of subjects offered in the sixth form encourages academic and vocational success.

Care, welfare and support are **good**. Most pupils receive good academic and personal support. The learning support and behaviour centre is very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership is **good** and management **satisfactory**. The headteacher's leadership is very good and has inspirational vision for the direction of the school. Subject leadership is satisfactory. The governors show strong commitment in their support of the school and have worked unstintingly for improvement since the last inspection. They do not enforce the statutory requirement for collective worship because of the school's secular nature. The senior management team is a good, cohesive body, dedicated to realising and enriching the headteacher's vision through their own expertise and experience. Subject management varies from very good to unsatisfactory, but is improving with the appointment of new heads of department.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents like the school atmosphere where their children are comfortable and want to learn. Leadership is inspiring; personal support and care is good. They praise the full involvement of the parent/teacher association (PTA), governors and pupils in provision. Some parents showed concern about the use of the form period, which inspectors found to be useful for academic mentoring though form tutors only spend a short time with the whole class.

Pupils are pleased to be part of the school and say they would recommend it. Many like the academic focus.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important improvements the school should make are:

- Raise the standard of attainment at GCSE in English language and mathematics.
- Establish baseline levels of attainment related to in National Curriculum levels for all pupils entering Year 9.
- Improve attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) in Year 9.
- Use the entry profiles for pupils who are learning English to provide more effective support for them.
- Improve provision for design and technology.

and, to meet statutory requirements

- Provide for ICT across the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Provide for the control aspect of design and technology in Year 9.
- Provide religious education in the sixth form.
- Provide a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT BIDDENHAM UPPER SCHOOL

This offers an exciting curriculum to its 142 students who are able to take a course suitable to their aspirations and ability. Its popularity is growing and numbers are increasing each year.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **good** sixth form, which is cost-effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A good range of subjects available.
- Sixth-formers are expected to take considerable responsibility in the school.
- Good racial harmony.
- The school encourages as many pupils as possible to enter the sixth form.
- Numbers are low on each course.

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	Good in English literature. Teaching stimulates an enthusiastic response. Satisfactory in communication studies.
Mathematics	Satisfactory . Teaching is good but timetabling for re-sit courses does not allow students to attend all lessons.
Science	Good in physics and biology. Very good in chemistry.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory . Standards are good for the small number of pupils taking the AVCE course but lower for AS-level with an insufficient range of activities.
Technology	Satisfactory in product design, textiles and food technology. The quality of work from present students is improving but schemes of work need more detail.
Humanities	Good in geography. Students make good use of ICT. Good in history. Attainment is rising and achievement is good.
Visual and performing arts and media	Satisfactory in art. Independent learning skills are well developed but teaching is not sufficiently challenging. Very good in drama. Students develop well as individuals.
Sports	Very good . Students are well taught and make very good progress in dance.
Health and social care	Satisfactory . Students learn very good personal skills, but the curriculum does not meet the needs of all, particularly those on the Access course.

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

Advice, guidance and support provided for students are **very good**. Academic mentoring is a great strength.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership is **good** and management **satisfactory**. The head of the sixth form has good vision for its development and successfully encourages students to take responsibility. Monitoring of the curriculum in all departments is not rigorous enough.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

All those interviewed said it is a very good sixth form, which offers them all they need.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Since the last inspection, standards have risen remarkably. Achievement is now satisfactory in Year 9 and Key Stage 4, and good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Rising standards at Key Stage 3.
- GCSE results in English literature, history, religious education, French and Urdu.
- Lack of National Curriculum baseline for all pupils on entry to the school.
- The school does not build systematically on the entry profile for pupils who are acquiring the English language to enable them to improve their comprehension.

Commentary

1. Standards shown by the National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds in English and mathematics are in line with the national average and with that of schools where pupils have similar prior attainment at the age of 11. Its performance is well above the average of schools whose pupils have similar home backgrounds. Science standards were below the national average and well below that of schools having similar results for 11-year-olds, but above those of schools in similar social circumstances. Over the past three years, Year 9 National Curriculum test results have improved and show rising standards as more capable pupils enter the school. This can be seen not only in English, mathematics and science, but also in teachers' assessments for other subjects, particularly history and religious education.
2. It is difficult to measure the progress and achievement of the current Year 9 because of the early date of the inspection, a lack of evidence in pupils' workbooks and limited baseline information. Although the school's assessment shows that pupils make progress during Year 9, it cannot reflect the true picture of how well they have achieved because the starting point in National Curriculum levels of achievement is not established for every pupil. All take tests in reading age and non-verbal reasoning at the beginning of Year 9, but this is an imprecise measure upon which to estimate standards.

Results in KS3 tests compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
English	E	E	C	C
Mathematics	D	C	C	C
Science	E	E	D	E
GCSE/GNV	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
5 or more A*-C	D	E	E	E
5 or more A* - G	E	E	E	E
1 or more A* - G	E	E*	E	E*

3. In Key Stage 4, overall standards achieved at GCSE are well below average in points score, but some subjects do much better, namely French, history, English literature and some of the home languages, for example Urdu. Although relatively few pupils take these examinations, they achieve well compared with their Key Stage 3 scores and national averages, and meet targets set for their predicted grades. The baseline used by most departments to predict GCSE levels is the average points score attained in English, mathematics and science, and, where necessary, the particular aptitude of pupils in non-core subjects. Taking this as the baseline, pupils achieve satisfactorily compared with similar schools. The trend in the

proportion of pupils achieving five A* - C grades at GCSE has declined since 2000; the improving quality of the intake has not had time to work its way through the school yet, though there are signs of improvement in Year 10. The school analyses the performance of all its ethnic groups, pupils with special educational needs and both genders, and has identified that pupils of white and Indian origin do better than those from Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is putting in measures to improve this. However, there is not enough support to develop English literacy, particularly to help pupils with subject-specific vocabulary.

4. Current standards, as observed during lessons, are average in English and mathematics in both key stages. Those in science are rising and are also now in line with those expected of pupils of this age. Pupils are acquiring a satisfactory standard of literacy, although more could be done to improve the comprehension and language skills of a significant number of pupils who do not speak English as their first language. Pupils' mathematical skills are improving in Year 9; improvement has yet to work its way through Key Stage 4. In science, there has been good improvement in Year 9. Pupils achieve well in English, geography, history, music and religious education in Key Stage 4 in particular because of good teaching. Standards and achievement are below average in ICT in both key stages, particularly in the application across the curriculum in Key Stage 4, where there is much to catch up on. Standards in business studies are also below average because not all lessons are taught by specialists.
5. Pupils with special educational needs have their full assessment details passed on, which provide a good baseline from which to judge their progress. Their achievement across the school is good. Most make good progress in lessons against the targets in their individual education plans (IEPs), which are monitored effectively by the subject departments, the special educational needs co-ordinator, and learning support assistants. All pupils are assessed for reading, spelling and general numeracy after admission and then twice a year over their school career. These assessments clearly demonstrate that most pupils make good progress over time. Factors which contribute to this include: the supportive attitudes of other pupils, teachers who are committed to including the pupils, the use of appropriate teaching approaches and materials, and the well-managed, committed and skilled intervention from learning support assistants.
6. A significant barrier to raising achievement in the school is its difficulty in identifying pupils' levels of attainment on entry and thus having a clear picture of their capabilities. A further barrier is the failure to ensure that pupils who do not speak English fluently have sufficient initial support to give them a level of English that will enable them to cope with the secondary curriculum. Pupils who are fluent in English as a second language make similar progress to native speakers, but many of those who are at an early stage of acquiring English make less progress, because their given targets are not precise enough to suit their individual learning needs. This was an issue identified at the last inspection and has not received sufficient attention from the school's management.

Sixth Form

7. In 2001, standards achieved in the sixth form were below the national average overall. Girls did better than boys and achieved average results in AS and A-levels; boys were well below average. Since small numbers of students take each sixth form course, valid comparisons cannot be made for 2002. Nevertheless, current achievement is good for the native English speakers, who are mostly those who continue with A-level studies. Students taking the Access course repeat English Language GCSE and most repeat mathematics, too. At present, however, most of those who do not speak English at home fail to improve their grades sufficiently. They are not taught by teachers who specialise in teaching English as a foreign language, nor are the English department teachers given training in the best methods to employ. There are several successes of the Access course, however, in that a small number of students go on to do A-level courses over the next two years and achieve grades good enough for them to get to university. Most students who do not speak English at home are

sufficiently fluent to cope with science and mathematics courses, for example, but the majority taking English and humanities at AS and A-level are of white British origin.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils like school, their attitudes to their work are good and their behaviour is usually at least satisfactory. They enjoy learning and play an important part in sustaining the relaxed atmosphere in the school. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory; their spiritual, moral and social development is good. Attendance is being raised to a satisfactory level.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships between pupils of varied backgrounds are very good.
- Pupils are well motivated and work productively.
- Pupils are responsible members of the school community who show sensitivity to the needs of others.

Commentary

8. Pupils willingly take responsibility for their own learning and participate enthusiastically in many activities outside lessons. They respond well to the school's will for them to work independently. They are readily infected by teachers' enthusiasm, which leads them to enjoy many subjects. In lessons and in extra-curricular activities, pupils work well both independently and co-operatively.
9. Around the school, there is a little boisterousness, but behaviour is mostly good. The need for excluding pupils has declined significantly. Pupils are confident that any incidence of bullying is well handled. The friendly demeanour of teaching and non-teaching staff throughout the school is much appreciated and strengthens pupils' good relationships with adults. As a result, pupils are comfortable asking for help from teachers or their peers for academic or personal problems, and are confident of receiving it. Their knowledge that their views about the school are taken into account develops a sense of status. Pupils value being treated as adults.
10. Pupils are successfully encouraged to pursue arguments in depth, to consider complex ideas and to explore assumptions. They show good respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others and benefit from the opportunities for spiritual development that occur, for example, in citizenship, religious education or English lessons. Pupils demonstrate they understand the need to care for others by participating, for example, in peer mentoring and paired reading schemes. Pupils' social development, including taking responsibility, is good, and the school council is regarded as effective. The school supports some very good cultural activities, especially in sport and music, and while the range of activities does not fully reflect the diversity of the pupil population, pupils respond well to the school's effectiveness in fostering mutual respect among pupils of different backgrounds.
11. Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities all feel valued and supported. In the lessons observed, all pupils were motivated and involved. Learning support assistants gave skilled help to pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, and to other pupils experiencing difficulties at that time, without embarrassing them or making them feel different. Other pupils were observed to help pupils with difficulties in some lessons.
12. The work of the Learning Support Behaviour Centre, established from the school's own resources approximately a year ago, allows positive intervention and withdrawal to help pupils with personal, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Pupils speak very positively of the support it provides and its success can further be demonstrated in a halving of exclusions since it opened.

13. The school has developed very good systems for improving attendance and punctuality. Extensive analysis of attendance data by dedicated staff has enabled approaches by the school and other agencies to be focused on relevant pupils and their families. As a result, both attendance and punctuality have improved significantly since the last inspection and since the year 2001-2002, when the level of attendance was still below the national average. Most pupils respond well to the responsibility of arriving on time for lessons in the absence of reminders from a periodic bell. This and the schools' other practices are well positioned to improve attendance and punctuality further.

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.9
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	2.0
National comparative data	1.2

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

14. The quality of education is **good**. Teaching is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. The curriculum is good and the positive ethos of the school provides a good and inclusive place to learn.

Teaching and learning

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good planning.
- Assessment procedures.
- Good variety in the activities provided in most classes.

- Development of literacy, particularly for non-native speakers of English.
- Five per cent unsatisfactory teaching seen.

Commentary

15. The school chooses its teaching staff carefully. It has invested heavily in systems for monitoring and evaluating teaching and this has brought about significant improvement since the last inspection. The quality of teaching is now good, whereas it was unsatisfactory at the time of the last report. Because of the sharing of expertise, teachers have good subject knowledge in their own areas. Many draw on their wide experience to explain new ideas to pupils simply in the context of everyday life. A good example is the simple explanation given in an A-level chemistry lesson of how the effects of drugs and medicines on the body are dependent on their chemical structure. Students were able to understand this immediately. However, in business studies, the use of a non-specialist teacher has restricted pupils' achievement; tasks, such as cutting and pasting in ICT, are not demanding enough.
16. Teachers' planning is good, though in several cases too detailed to be able to sustain for long. Objectives are clear, and the majority of the teachers are planning to meet the wide range of ability found in the school. In one Year 10 science lesson, for example, the teacher had produced recording sheets for lower ability pupils, which assisted them in recording and experiment. The long lessons (75 minutes) require a good variety of activities to be planned. Teachers plan effectively to include all pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, making good use of the targets in their IEPs, which they have devised themselves. However,

some teachers do not always involve learning support assistants in planning or make them aware of lesson plans in time for them to be able to modify materials and teaching appropriately before the lessons. Most teachers use a wide range of approaches to include all pupils by using different kinds of questions and offering ongoing help and advice to individual pupils when they are working on their own or in small groups. However, little use is made of ICT to help pupils with dyslexia to learn, and although most teachers are aware of certain language difficulties, there is insufficient support to help such pupils to adjust to the language of the secondary curriculum.

17. Assessment is good overall, though not tight enough in Year 9. From Year 10 upwards, each pupil's individual profile is updated termly in every subject and targets for improvement set. As a result, pupils know where they are and how to improve. Ongoing assessment is used routinely in order to review pupils' progress towards meeting their targets. However, not all teachers mark work in a manner which gives information to the pupils on what they have learned, or the progress they are making on meeting their targets. Many teachers expect their pupils to do well, as seen in religious education and French, and also have high expectations of good behaviour and hard work. Most lessons start and end on time and the pace is kept brisk by an interesting range of activities. Most teachers use homework effectively to extend what is taught in class.
18. In most classes, teachers expect their pupils to do well, but this is not always so. In a Year 9 design and technology lesson, for example, pupils were doing work expected of 11-year-olds. Although some pupils believed they are well challenged, this was not the case for the majority. In one business studies lesson, the teacher's expectations were low; pupils were cutting out from worksheets and pasting into their books. Higher-ability pupils were not being challenged and nor were the majority of average pupils.
19. Teachers have a good deal of training in the development of different learning styles and many adopt them in their teaching. Pupils are consulted on numerous occasions; they are asked, for example, to evaluate lessons. The evaluations are taken into account by teachers in order to refine their work. A good variety of practical work and problem-solving activities in groups and seminar style take place, especially in the sixth form. Pupils also have access to some good quality books and equipment. These approaches enable pupils to learn well, as seen in science, history and religious education. However, in art and design, seating arrangements sometimes prevent collaboration or evaluation of each other's work, and this has an adverse effect on standards of achievement.
20. An area of training which is lacking, however, is how to ensure that pupils who do not speak English as their first language are able to understand the work in all subjects. Literacy skills are developing satisfactorily as a result of the National Initiative for Key Stage 3, but this is not the case for pupils who are at an early stage of acquiring English. They do not get sufficient individual support when they come from middle school, and their language skills, therefore, develop slower than they should. Most support in class comes from teachers themselves. Many are new to the school and have not yet received training, but support from specialists is inadequate, which results in some unsatisfactory provision. Teachers of science and geography apply numeracy skills in their subjects but the use of ICT is still at an early stage in most subjects, including science and design and technology

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 123 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
2 (1.5%)	25 (20.5%)	50 (40.5%)	40 (32.5%)	6 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

The curriculum

Curriculum provision is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A wide variety of options for Key Stage 4.
- Very good extra-curricular activities.
- A good choice of academic subjects in the sixth form.
- Statutory requirements are not met in ICT across the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and in religious education in the sixth form.

Commentary

21. In Year 9, a satisfactory range of National Curriculum subjects is provided, with two modern foreign languages, citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE), but it does not meet the full requirements for design and technology in the area of control. In Key Stage 4, the curriculum is widened to provide a good mix of academic and vocational options, and a work-related programme for a small number of Year 10 pupils. It has been thoughtfully planned to meet the needs of individuals. The main programme of optional subjects from which all pupils make their choices was drawn up after consultation with them, and is flexible enough to allow for individual aspirations in the changing profile of the school population.
22. As well as a wide core of English, mathematics, science, ICT, physical education, religious education and PSHE/citizenship, an open options programme is provided which gives pupils the widest possible choice. Almost all pupils get their first choice of option subjects, which motivates them to work hard and ultimately to reach their potential. Additionally, it is possible for those with particular interests or strengths to follow an individual learning plan, either by taking a computerised learning programme or by joining the classes offered to another year group. This requires great commitment from pupils, but it is proving successful for those pupils who make this choice. The choices available enable pupils to choose subjects with, for example, a performing arts or modern languages theme, or vocational courses ranging from motor vehicles to catering and hairdressing. Several well-motivated pupils have also negotiated an independent study programme whereby they can take subjects that the school does not offer, such as psychology and "International Signing" (for the deaf), and this flexibility is proving very successful.
23. In the sixth form, there is an exciting choice of academic AS- and A-level courses as well as vocational business studies and health and social care. Although several A-level courses in Year 13 have small numbers, the sixth form is growing. Although several groups are uneconomic, the school is rightly subsidising them in the belief that the sixth form is growing and that these groups will shortly become viable. The growing number of students from other schools, who are attracted by the academic subjects and are swelling the lower sixth in the current year, support this view. The school runs an Access course in Year 12 which has patchy success. At its best, it enables students whose limited English prevents them coping with the literacy demands of an A-level course to take an extra year of study. As a result, five students are studying A-level in the third year sixth.
24. The school aims for and succeeds in providing a good quality of education which meets the individual needs of students. The key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are developing satisfactorily through the curriculum. However, the acquisition of a satisfactory standard of literacy to enable all pupils and students to gain full access to their studies still eludes many of them, particularly those who do not speak English fluently. Skills in ICT remain below average, as at the last inspection, and this adversely affects development in all subjects.

25. Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities do not experience a significantly different curriculum from other pupils and the school is very committed to including them in all aspects of the school's life. Each subject teacher is responsible for setting subject targets within pupils' individual education plans (IEPs). Whilst this ensures that each teacher is aware of the pupils' difficulties and can assess their needs, and plan lessons effectively to include them, pupils have many targets. Most targets relate to difficulties with literacy or numeracy, or personal and social difficulties, and are very similar between subject areas. It would be helpful to the pupils, and to their parents and carers, if teachers adopted a more coherent approach to target setting. At the present time, some pupils are unclear about what their main targets are or which targets have priority.
26. Staffing is satisfactory overall and meets the requirements of the curriculum in mainly specialist provision. Only in a few areas, such as business studies, are there non-specialists. The learning support assistants are experienced practitioners but insufficient in number to support all the groups which contain pupils with special educational needs at any one time. There is very little support in class for pupils who do not speak English as their first language.
27. The accommodation is good and well cared for, providing all that is required for specialist subject teaching. Accommodation for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities is good, and includes a main classroom and a smaller room for the Learning Support Behaviour Centre. The main classroom is used effectively as a "drop-in" centre for pupils during lunchtimes. Outdoor provision for sport is very good.
28. The resources are satisfactory. There are sufficient textbooks and computers, but some computer software, such as control, is too old to be compatible with modern machines. Resources for supporting the learning of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities are satisfactory. Some of the materials and computer software designed to help pupils overcome their difficulties in literacy are good, but some ICT resources, notably for those with writing difficulties are unsatisfactory. The latter do not speed up pupils' access to the curriculum. The more useful ICT resources which the school has are used well. In a Year 10 English lesson, for example, a pupil with an arthritic wrist has had use of a laptop to enable her to keep up with the others.
29. The curriculum is enriched with high quality activities provided after school and at lunch times; they range across a wide variety of sport, drama and music. The music department gives a weekly concert with an eclectic range of music. Pupils demonstrate their independence and self-confidence by taking charge of these activities. A steel band rehearsal taken by Year 9 pupils, only just into the school, was an outstanding demonstration of pupils' ability to work unsupervised to a good level of performance.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes good care of pupils. Most pupils receive good academic and personal support. Systems for ensuring that pupils work in a healthy and safe environment are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Care of pupils is a high priority for staff.
- The learning support and behaviour centre provides very good support.
- Advice to help pupils make informed decisions about their future is good.
- Tutor periods are of inconsistent quality; they are not valued by pupils.
- The needs of pupils for whom English is a second language are not always met fully.

Commentary

30. The school has effective induction arrangements for new pupils and provides a relaxed and nurturing environment which encourages them to learn and to flourish. Pupils appreciate this atmosphere; they report that it makes them feel secure and that it enables them to concentrate on their work. There is a highly regarded support centre which makes positive and effective efforts to identify particular pupils and then provides very effective help, whether the problem is an aspect of attendance, behaviour or a social or personal need.
31. Teaching and non-teaching staff are devoted to providing good care so they work hard to develop a good understanding of pupils' needs, which they meet well. There is a good system of academic monitoring, which includes target setting that many pupils find helpful, particularly in the sixth form, where targets are most specific. Tutorial periods sometimes lack clarity of purpose and so are not taught successfully, which undermines their value. Lessons are generally well planned for all pupils, especially those with special educational needs. Where they are less carefully planned, the lesson objectives are not clear and provision for pupils with EAL is inappropriate, resulting in their making too little progress.
32. Pupils are confident about requesting and receiving help, both from other pupils and from teachers or other staff. Good guidance is provided when pupils are making choices of GCSE options and work experience. Pupils have access to sufficient information from a range of sources, including Connexions personal advisers, and know that teachers are approachable for further discussion, either at designated times or on demand. They receive very good guidance about the sixth form or alternatives, and about routes thereafter, such as university courses.
33. One mechanism for participation in school life is the school council; pupils are confident that views expressed there are taken seriously. Systems for ensuring child protection and health and safety are thorough and effective. Appropriate attention is paid to fire safety and the handling of medication; no significant threats to pupils' health or safety were identified during the inspection.
34. Although provision for pupils with special educational needs is good, they are not always sure how they can achieve the targets set for them. The school's induction process for such pupils is very good. Liaison with the feeder middle schools is good; each co-ordinator organises the transfer of information, visits and interviews. Pupils consequently feel valued and that their difficulties are taken seriously. The school liaises very effectively with external special educational needs support staff and with health and social services departments. The school has a trained nurse on the staff, who works effectively with pupils who have dietary or medical problems. The support the school offers to pupils with mental health difficulties, including adolescent depression, is excellent.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has created and maintained an effective partnership with parents. The school's relationships with other schools and other institutions are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school tries hard to maintain the interest, co-operation and support of all parents.
- Good use is made of school facilities by the community for adult education.
- A range of agencies and organisations support the school well.
- The information published for parents does not meet statutory requirements fully.

Commentary

35. Parents are very appreciative of the school, particularly the ethos of care and the welcoming atmosphere this produces. The school has taken particular steps to develop communications with parents. For example, it has employed staff who ensure that those who speak Urdu, Bengali or other community languages are able to play a full part in the school's work. The governing body is increasingly representative of the general population from which pupils come.
36. Links with other schools and the community are good in some subjects and very good for physical education.. Personal contacts between the school and staff in primary schools produce useful information about new pupils' academic and personal characteristics, but this is not always enough information to provide a complete picture and some schools do not produce all the information required. However, the system for inducting new pupils is effective and much appreciated by their parents. Parents express great confidence in the leadership and management of the school; they are satisfied with most features that affect their children's work and the support they receive. Inspection findings support these views.
37. While a minority of parents say they would like improvements in the information they receive about their children's progress, those present at the pre-inspection meeting praised the willingness of the school to respond to approaches for information. A well-presented prospectus gives parents and potential parents a good overview of the school and its aims but neither the prospectus nor the governors' annual report, nor reports on pupils' progress, include national test results for the purpose of comparison. Annual reports on pupils' progress provide summaries of pupils' achievements, but while the level of detail provided and the usefulness of guidance on how to improve is often good, the quality of these features varies among the authors of different subjects. The annual reports are enhanced by supplementary individual student profiles, which are updated several times during the year. These profiles include specific targets for each subject and indications of standards attained compared with each individual's potential, together with clear indications of personal development in areas such as attitudes to work, personal organisation and oral contributions.
38. Parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities are happy with the education they are receiving. The annual reviews of statements of special educational needs are thorough and comprehensive. However, parents are not currently systematically involved with identifying the needs of their children and in setting targets for improvement, or in systematically reviewing their progress towards meeting these targets. The school works well with feeder middle schools to identify and support these pupils. The co-ordinator attends the last annual review of each pupil with a statement of special educational needs prior to admission. Pupils who speak English as a second language enter school with a profile of their level of English. Targets from this are transformed to the EAL register, but they are not precise enough to enable sufficient progress to be made in language acquisition.
39. The local Education Action Zone (EAZ) makes a useful contribution to the school, for example, by supporting the sports college application and helping with staff development. Other local organisations provide further help: pupils benefit from the education business partnership, for instance, which organises health and safety checks for their work experience in Year 11. The school's computing resources, as well as its sports facilities, are well used by the local community; such arrangements will be increased by the school's sports college status.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is **good**. Management and governance are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The strong leadership of the headteacher and senior management team.
- Good monitoring of teaching and pupils' performance.
- Good management of special educational needs.
- Good financial management.

- Provision for pupils who are at an early stage of learning English needs improving.
- Statutory requirements are not met in collective worship and some curricular provision.

Commentary

40. The leadership of the school is good. The headteacher is a strong leader with very clear vision for the development of the school. He has led it from the point of closure at the last inspection to the current situation where the roll is rising and the school is almost full. He has successfully led the school to its goal of achieving the recently acquired Sports College status, and has very high aspirations for the school's further development. He has chosen his management team astutely and actively encourages and supports leadership development throughout the school. There is good, firm leadership from the senior managers, who act as good role models for other staff. They are very good classroom practitioners as well as having a strong corporate sense of purpose.
41. Management is satisfactory. The senior management team is strong. Delegation by the headteacher is effective. Each member of the team is dedicated, inspired and works knowledgeably with the rest. Management of subjects varies between good and unsatisfactory. There are several new subject managers this term who are still bedding into the role, but are already having a significant effect on their department. The school carries out effective annual self-review. Its main targets for improvement are arrived at through consultation between staff, pupils, parents and governors. Curriculum and pastoral leaders make an effective contribution to achieving the school's goals and values. There are good working relationships and a drive for improvement throughout the school.
42. The school has very good policies for special educational needs, which comply with all legislation. The identification and support of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities are well managed by the special educational needs co-ordinator, who has a clear vision for development. The governor with responsibility for special educational needs plays an important part. The co-ordinator communicates very well with subject departments, directly and through special educational needs key teachers in each department. She has delivered good quality training and offered well-focused support and advice to all members of staff. As a result, all teachers are fully committed to inclusion. She manages her team of learning support assistants very well and they are appreciative of the good quality induction, help in their performance management and their professional development. However, she does not currently monitor the teaching of these pupils in subject lessons, though she and the school's senior management team have timetabled some lesson observations for this school year.
43. Teaching and learning are monitored and evaluated most effectively through the criteria set out in the school's "Foundations for Excellence". All new staff undertake initial training courses at whatever level they enter the school. Their teaching is monitored and supported by more senior staff and by a mentor trained and employed specifically for this purpose. This enables new teachers to settle in quickly and establish areas to improve their teaching. Performance management procedures are carried out with commitment and used well for maintaining and improving the effectiveness of teaching.

44. The school has very effective systems in place for monitoring the achievement of individual pupils, although only relative in Year 9 as no clear standard of attainment on entry has been put into place. The effects of its policies for managing behaviour are successfully reflected across the whole school. Most departments have good systems for planning the curriculum and effective assessment procedures in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The school runs a flexible timetable to enable many pupils to follow independent learning courses and to suit their option choices. The day-to-day running of the school is smooth; administrative staff are effective and efficient in carrying out their duties.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,589,875	Balance from previous year	14,846
Total expenditure	2,643,836	Balance carried forward	-39,115
Expenditure per pupil	4,072		

45. Financial management is good; the school is constantly running on insufficient funds for the number of pupils on roll, since funding lags behind the increasing number of pupils by about six months. Nevertheless, resources are targeted towards meeting the priorities on the school development plan and getting the best value. One exception is provision for pupils with EAL. The specific funding for supporting these pupils has been cut, making it difficult for the school to provide effectively for them. The school participates in the Bedfordshire EAZ and uses funding well in providing for staff development through the monitoring of teaching.
46. The governors show strong commitment in their support of the school and have worked unstintingly for improvement since the last inspection. They understand their role and have specific responsibilities in the portfolio system under which the governing body is run. Longer serving members have a very good knowledge of the particular challenges facing the school. Newer governors have a strong sense of responsibility and want to learn more, particularly about performance data, in order to challenge the school effectively. Governance is unsatisfactory, however, where it fails to publish National Curriculum test and examination results in the annual report to parents, and where it declines to insist on its statutory duty to provide a daily act of collective worship. This is because the school defines itself as secular.
47. The staff and governors have decided that a daily act of collective worship is not appropriate in a school community with so many different faiths represented. The one act of worship per week, nevertheless, is of good quality. Compensation is made very well in the half GCSE in religious education taken by all Year 10 pupils. The school thus responds to the broadly Christian background of this country's education. Attainment in this GCSE is consistently high (80 per cent A* -C in 2002). The school takes this responsibility very seriously, believing that pupils gain a good insight and understanding of other faiths. Moreover, the headteacher is successfully persuading parents who wish their children to opt out of this course to take it. Students themselves opt in to study faiths different from their own. Muslim pupils, for example, who know a great deal about Islam, take the course in Christianity or Hinduism.

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

- Teachers use a very effective range of teaching skills.
- Pupils achieve well.
- Pupils' work is well marked, recognising individuals' achievements and indicating what they should do to improve.

- Attainment in English Language at GCSE is below the national average.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in lessons for reading and for writing.

Commentary

48. Results in National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds had been well below the national average for years, but in 2002 attainment improved strongly to be in line with the national average, well above that of schools with pupils of similar prior attainment and those in similar social circumstances. There is no significant difference between the attainment of girls and boys. Attainment on entry to Key Stage 3 in middle schools that send pupils on to Biddenham is below average and a large proportion of pupils have English as an additional language. However, the school does not have a baseline of National Curriculum levels for pupils who enter the school. Nevertheless, the pupils' performance in the tests represents satisfactory achievement for their first year in the school.
49. Standards in GCSE English literature have always been high. Standards in English language have declined; in 2002 they were very low in comparison with national levels. The proportion gaining grades A*-C was less than half the national average. Girls achieved significantly better than boys at those higher grades but a large proportion of Year 11 gained grade D. In 2003 there was a significant improvement in attainment in English language and the proportion attaining grades A*-C almost doubled. Although results remain below the national level, they represent very good achievement for these pupils in relation to their National Curriculum test results two years earlier, when they were well below the national average. Current standards are average in both key stages.
50. Teaching and learning are at least good; over 50 per cent of lessons observed were very good. The best teaching is characterised by very good teaching skills and a good range of well-chosen activities. The range of activities, which includes work on grammar and spelling, media studies, creative writing, and literature, including Shakespeare and poetry, is suitably broad. Teachers' expectations are high and pupils respond enthusiastically, seeking to achieve well. There is some very good creative writing. Work is well marked with pertinent personal comments praising individual pupils' achievement and effort. Pupils are set targets, enabling them to recognise for themselves what they have to do to improve.
51. At GCSE, teachers have given much thought to choosing suitable texts, planning assignments and improving essay writing. This is reflected in the good achievement observed in pupils' folders. Marking is accurate, thorough and well related to the examination marking criteria. The good teaching means that pupils across the ability range achieve well in lessons, as did a low ability group analysing the effectiveness of a television advertisement in a media studies

assignment. Some basic desktop publishing skills were observed in pupils' GCSE folders, but no use of ICT was seen in lessons.

52. A significant number of pupils re-take their GCSE English language examination each year but the success rate is low. It is mainly the small minority who initially missed the qualification by a small margin who are successful; most receive low and very low grades when they take the examination for a second time. However, it is a policy of the school that late developers should have the opportunity to obtain the qualification when they are a little older, though it does not provide specialist support for re-sit courses.
53. Leadership of the department is very good and management is good, even though there is not a structure of delegated responsibilities. The newly appointed head of department has a very good leadership style and is successfully making good teachers into a very effective team. An excellent weekly newsletter ensures good communication. Performance management has been well established, but the department does not yet recognise and share its strengths.
54. The curriculum is well planned for pupils of all ages and abilities. It meets every requirement of the National Curriculum and of GCSE specifications. Extra-curricular opportunities are good. Links with feeder schools and other secondary schools are developing well, but curricular links are not yet included.
55. Since the last inspection, the subject has made satisfactory improvement. In the last four terms, there has been good improvement, notably in leadership, in the effectiveness of the teaching team and in examination results. The development of literacy throughout the school is not yet fully satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

56. Provision for the development of literacy in the curriculum is satisfactory. The school's development planning recognises the importance of improving pupils' reading and writing ability to raise standards in all subjects; this is particularly true for the large proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The Reading Recovery programme is one of the school's highest priority targets. The school is working towards the EAZ's ambitious target that the reading age of all pupils should catch up with their chronological age, and is in close partnership with a commercial firm in schemes to improve pupils' reading. All teachers have received some training in teaching literacy skills. A literacy management group was discontinued because it did not attract representatives from all subject departments. Instead, all subjects are required to include literacy provision in their departmental planning. In the current year, 14 departments received separate development funding for measures to improve pupils' reading and writing. However, there is no policy to co-ordinate literacy across the curriculum.
57. Some elements of the National Literacy Strategy and the National Key Stage 3 Strategy for English have been incorporated into schemes of work in a few departments. The range and effectiveness of these intentions vary across the school as the following examples show. Key words such as ecosystems and fluvial are displayed and defined in geography lessons and some grammar is taught in modern foreign languages, though other opportunities to develop literacy are not exploited. In craft, design and technology, there is no evidence of literacy teaching, apart from some key words on display, and although mathematics is making a contribution to pupils' literacy through the display in all classrooms of key words and diagrams to explain concepts, these are not effectively referred to in teaching. Marking in geography is good in that teachers correct errors in expression and grammar. The librarian teaches a basic course in library skills to all pupils on entry. Sixth form geography lessons introduce higher-level vocabulary through game cards, some of which are produced in large print for dyslexic students. Good examples of pupils being taught reading and research skills, using the Internet, were observed in drama, but this was rare during the week of the inspection.
58. A significant number of pupils have been identified as having English as an additional language. In most lessons, there is no additional support for these pupils, and teachers are

often unsure about what pupils' individual learning needs are. However, many of these pupils were fluent in English and require no additional help.

English as an additional language (EAL)

Provision for pupils who are fluent in English is **satisfactory**, but for those who are not fluent and those who are at an early stage of acquiring the language, it is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school communicates well with middle schools in the EAZ.
- Pupils who are fluent in English nearly all reach their potential.
- Funding has been cut and support in class is minimal.
- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory for a significant minority of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English.

Commentary

59. Pupils who come from middle schools and who are an early stage of learning English, enter Year 9 with a profile showing their level of competence in the language. However, this is not used to establish a baseline of proficiency from which a pupils' progress can be tracked through the school. Instead, pupils are put onto a register and set targets, many of which are too wide to measure progress.
60. Reading tests are used annually to track all pupils' progress from the time they enter the school. Results show that the native English and those who are fluent in English as a second language maintain their levels. However, many who are not fluent regress. The current Year 11, for example, have had their reading ages tracked for the last two years, and the proportion that has a reading age of three years or more below its chronological age has steadily increased from about one third to over a half. The school also uses other tests, but the system is not reliable enough to ensure EAL pupils can make progress in the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.
61. Although the school analyses its National Curriculum tests and GCSE results with regard to ethnicity, and has successfully identified over 30 Bengali pupils for targeted support, this support does not carry on into the sixth form, and a significant number of students continue to have problems with English. They frequently omit the definite article, for example. Their needs are not systematically analysed and met, so they do not achieve as well as they might.
62. A pilot group of 26 pupils in Year 12, who did not manage a grade C in English GCSE in Year 11, re-sat the examination. Of these, only five converted their grade to a C. Teachers working with these pupils reported that they underachieved because they did not have the support of an EAL specialist. The results are a poor return on the school's investment, particularly as a Year 13 pupil studying A-level English was still making basic errors.
63. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in lessons where pupils are offered insufficient support. There is good practice when teachers are knowledgeable and make special provision or offer additional support themselves. Practice is unsatisfactory when teachers do not recognise the need to intervene and leave pupils to their own devices. As a result, pupils in these lessons make little progress. The school has taken a decision that all teachers across the curriculum will provide the majority of support to pupils with English as a second language. However, since funds have been cut by over a half, the school has lost its full-time co-ordinator, and the current co-ordinator, seconded to the EAZ, has too little time or resources. Nevertheless, the staff are very hard-working and the school has invested in training, particularly for new staff, though some departments have not yet taken responsibility for planning classroom support.

64. Since the previous inspection, the school has not moved away from the use of a reading test to provide information on pupils at entry. It was judged then to be highly inappropriate and disadvantageous, and it continues to be so. At the last inspection, there was little specific teaching of EAL. There was also a lack of directed, structured teaching of English in small groups. Consequently, pupils' progress was slow. These flaws remain and the school has made unsatisfactory progress since the previous inspection.

Modern foreign languages

The school teaches French, German, Urdu and Bengali. French was inspected in detail; the other languages were sampled.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some very good teaching and learning, with high levels of challenge and expectation.
- Clarity of vision and analysis of development needs by the new head of department.
- The programme of exchanges and day visits to France and Germany.
- Standards in German, Urdu and Bengali are below the national average.

- Inconsistency in the quality of teaching.
- Inconsistent use of assessment and consequent target-setting at an individual level.

Commentary

65. Standards at the end of Year 9, as judged by teacher assessments, are in line with national expectations. Boys do less well than girls, and to a greater degree than the national picture. Current standards are variable and are linked to the quality of teaching. When lessons are well focused and pupils are appropriately challenged, achievement is very good for pupils of all abilities; when the purpose of learning is unclear and not communicated to pupils, they make modest or no progress. These lessons lack differentiation, and pupils with special educational needs or high attainment are often disadvantaged. In a few lessons, boys receive more of the teacher's attention and girls make less progress, especially in speaking.
66. In 2002, the percentage of pupils achieving A* to C results at GCSE in French was well above the national average. In German, attainment at GCSE was well below the national average. In other languages (Urdu and Bengali), the percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades was below the national average.
67. Current standards in Years 10 and 11 reflect the variation seen in examination results. Where pupils underachieve, teachers provide little variety in tasks set or work of varying difficulty to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. Consequently, writing is underdeveloped, with few opportunities for extended writing or writing in different genres.
68. Pupils' achievement is commensurate with the quality of teaching and learning. When pupils know what they need to do to improve and the learning objectives are suitably linked, they achieve well. In French, for example, Year 9 pupils, knowing the objectives, manipulated regular and irregular verbs in the present tense and combined this with the use of a number of negatives. They then moved on to build sentences, using a range of infinitives from earlier learning. They relished the teacher's high expectation and visibly grew in self-confidence and competence. By the end of the lesson, they were able to assess and appreciate how they had progressed.
69. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Where they are good or better, teachers have good subject knowledge. They use a variety of good teaching and learning styles that take account of pupils' prior learning. Teachers and pupils use the foreign language

appropriately and pupils are highly involved. . In a Year 10 lesson, pupils revised verb tenses, successfully using visual, aural and oral prompts. In a team competition which followed, all pupils contributed and made good progress in their learning.

70. When teaching is unsatisfactory opportunities for learning are restricted. Activities are not always matched to pupils' learning needs and there is insufficient focus on pupils' speaking and writing. Teachers do not understand fully how to help pupils to improve their oral ability, and there is little or no paired or group work when pupils can practise speaking. Pupils' achievement in these lessons is, therefore, often unsatisfactory.
71. Assessment of learning and its use across the department is not consistent. Where teachers are using assessment and target-setting boxes in exercise books, they have raised pupils' expectations, but this policy is not being followed by all teachers. The department is unable to plot pupils' progress through Year 9 because it does not have robust systems for tracking pupils' progress and it receives little data from the middle schools. Likewise, there is no departmental mechanism for plotting progress in sufficient detail through Key Stage 4.
72. The new head of department has a clear vision for the development of the department and is providing good leadership. Already, there is a real sense of purpose among the teaching team. The head of department's early analysis of the team's priorities is sound and should significantly improve pupils' experiences. These include improving teaching methodology and assessment. A draft department development plan is being further developed in consultation with all department members.
73. Since the previous inspection, attainment in French and German has remained broadly in line with national expectations. In Bengali and Urdu, pupils achieve standards that are below or well below national expectations in contrast to good and very high standards at the previous inspection. The use of information and communication technology is very limited and statutory requirements are not currently met. The low time allocation for dual linguists in Year 9 has persisted and remains insufficient.

MATHEMATICS

The provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The attainment of pupils in Year 9 is improving rapidly.
- There is a good working atmosphere and pupils have positive attitudes to learning.
- The planning of the curriculum for Year 9 is good.
- Those pupils who enter the school with below average attainment are not clearly identified and targeted for catch-up programmes.

Commentary

74. The results of the National Curriculum Assessments at end of Year 9 in 2002 were close to the national average, but with a higher than average proportion of lower levels. These results were very high when compared with similar schools, but were average when compared with pupils' prior attainment. The boys' results were slightly above average, whilst those of the girls were slightly below. In 2003, the results improved with the girls achieving considerably better than the boys. Over the past five years, the results have been improving at a faster rate than the national trend.
75. GCSE results in 2002 were well below average in comparison with all schools nationally and in relation to the prior attainment of the pupils, and below those of schools in similar circumstances. Boys results were better than girls. The results in 2003 were similar to those

in 2002, but girls did better than boys. There were no significant differences in the achievement of pupils from different ethnic groups. The improvement seen in the Year 9 results in 2001 was not reflected in the GCSE results of the same cohort of pupils in 2003. A small number of lower-ability pupils took the Entry Level Qualification and gained satisfactory grades.

76. Higher-ability pupils are achieving well. In Year 9, they have a good understanding of fractions, square roots and ratio. They use Pythagoras Theorem successfully, and solve increasingly complex problems. Average and lower-ability pupils and those with special needs are making satisfactory progress in understanding and measuring angles, though are insecure with written work. In Key Stage 4, higher-ability pupils have good understanding of algebra and trigonometry. Other pupils have a basic level of numeracy skills and can interpret elementary statistics and understand different kinds of averages. However, pupils in Key Stage 4 are still not sufficiently familiar with a range of mental calculation methods, even though mental work has improved.
77. In Year 9, pupils attain average standards. Girls do better than boys, on the whole. Overall achievement is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress when suitably supported. There are no marked differences in the achievements being made by different ethnic groups.
78. The quality of teaching is satisfactory; one-third of the lessons seen were good. In Year 9, teaching is well planned and takes account of national initiatives. For example, teachers use games and pupil whiteboards to make instant assessments in lessons. Most lessons have a plenary that summarises the work done. Teachers motivate pupils by rewarding success and providing helpful comments on their written work.
79. Teachers contribute to pupils' literacy development satisfactorily by displaying key vocabulary, but do not make the key words sufficiently explicit in their teaching. Textbooks have appropriate levels of language, enabling, as in one lesson, a number of pupils for whom English is an additional language to understand their task. Homework is regularly set and marked, reinforcing work done in class. Pupils' progress is tracked effectively through half-termly teacher assessments, though the assessment tasks are not standardised across. Although work is largely well matched to pupils' attainments, some lessons in Year 9 revise work successfully completed in Years 7 or 8, thus slowing pupils' progress. There is currently insufficient targeting of lower ability pupils for catch-up programmes in Year 9. In Key Stage 4, teachers' questioning does not give sufficient scope for pupils to offer their own explanations.
80. The large majority of pupils apply themselves well to tasks, concentrate on teachers' presentation and give responses when asked. Behaviour is good and they work well on individual tasks. The work of most pupils is carefully presented in their books, as is their coursework.
81. Leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory. Curriculum planning for Year 9 is good and the training received by the teachers for the Key Stage 3 Strategy has been very effective. Curriculum planning for Key Stage 4 is being revised. Information and communication technology is beginning to be used in mathematics lessons, but is not well developed. An individualised teaching programme has been installed on the school network, with the potential to increase the scope for pupils' self-study. The department does not have a systematic way of analysing where and when different groups of pupils are underachieving. As a result, such pupils are not well targeted for extra help.
82. Since the last school inspection, the levels of attainment at the end of Year 9 have risen considerably. The planning and teaching of the Key Stage 3 curriculum has improved with more clearly focused, objective-based teaching.

Mathematics across the curriculum

83. The teaching of numeracy and pupils' skills are developing well within mathematics itself. All staff has had training to raise awareness of mathematics in other subjects. However, there is not a suitable policy for numeracy across the curriculum. During the inspection pupils were seen to apply mathematics in a number of other subjects. In history they analysed graphs and used time lines; in geography they did numerical calculations of population density; in health and social care they used median charts of height to weight ratio and graphs of breathing rates. Pupils varied in their ability to apply their numeracy skills to these tasks. Further development of numeracy across the curriculum is not yet made through teacher training. Teachers do not share the mathematical skills that pupils can be expected to know and understand at different levels.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The rising standards in examination results, particularly in Year 9.
- The thorough lesson planning which contributes to the good teaching and learning.
- The well-developed learning culture shown by the pupils.
- Use of stimulating wall displays, including photos of pupils at work.
- The leadership of the department and the complementary qualities shown by the teaching staff.

- Schemes of work are not up-to-date.
- The need for further training to enable teachers to make better provision for pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language.

Commentary

84. Results in Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2002 continued the marked improvement since 2000. However, results remain below the national average, and well below that of schools in which pupils perform similarly in tests for 11-year-olds. Pupils attained less well in science than in either English or mathematics. In 2003, significant improvements have occurred at Level 5 and above, and they are likely to be close to the national average. This improvement also applies to grades of Level 6 and above, where the 14 per cent increase places them above the national average for 2002. The attainment of girls remains better than that of boys. These latest results indicate that levels of achievement are broadly satisfactory.
85. At GCSE in 2002, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* - C almost doubled, but still remained below the national average of 50 per cent. However, the department's results compared favourably with those of most other subjects. Boys had greater levels of achievement than girls and did particularly well in the higher grades, where the department's results were better than the national average. In 2003, the proportion of higher grades fell slightly, contributing to a slight decrease in the A* - C pass rate.
86. Standards of work seen during the inspection indicate that most pupils are making satisfactory progress in science, and achieve an average standard at both key stages now, particularly on those occasions when teaching assistants are present. Skills of scientific enquiry are developing satisfactorily. The department's use of word displays, and emphasis on creating opportunities for oral work and reading aloud in class, is helping the large number of pupils with special educational needs, and those who are at an early stage of learning English, achieve satisfactorily. Further support and guidance for teachers would help raise the achievement of these pupils even further. The high standard of wall display, including samples of pupils' work, provides a rich environment and gives the department a high profile.

Notebooks are particularly well presented and the work is well marked and graded, with praise given for good effort.

87. The quality of teaching and learning is good. During the inspection, many examples of good and very good teaching were observed. In all lessons, pupils were very well behaved and appeared keen to learn. As a result, teachers were able to concentrate on teaching the learning objectives, indicated in the thoroughly-produced lesson plans. The better lessons were characterised by the presence of enthusiastic teachers, who stimulate the pupils by varied and interesting activities, and maintain a brisk pace. An example of one of these lessons was a “whodunnit” approach to find an antidote to the poison taken by one of the science teachers. In another, the digital projector was well used to provide a visual stimulus to the pupils. In these better lessons, effective questioning is used to extend the pupils’ thinking and, as a result, the pupils achieve well. The further use of technology in lessons, including ICT and the availability of interactive whiteboards would further enhance the quality of teaching.
88. Since the previous inspection, most areas requiring attention have been addressed. The quality of teaching has improved and examination results are rising. All pupils now have the opportunity of studying double science, or of obtaining a double GCSE grade for the alternative applied science course. Practical skills are well developed in all year groups and the teaching is virtually all done by specialists. Links with the feeder schools have improved, and Year 8 pupils are invited to attend science-based activities in the department. The new head of department provides good leadership of the department and a clear vision for its future development.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers’ subject knowledge and classroom management.
- Provision for independent learning.
- New subject leader.

- Examination results.
- Lack of baseline assessment in Year 9.
- Lack of provision for teaching computer control.

Commentary

89. Teachers’ assessment of ICT in Year 9 showed that pupils achieved significantly below the national average in 2002; there was no difference between the performance of boys and girls. However, provisional results for 2003 indicate that standards are much improved, with girls performing better than boys at the higher levels of attainment. At Key Stage 4 all pupils entered for the GCSE full course attained grades A* - C, and about 50 per cent of those entered for the short course performed satisfactorily.
90. In Year 9, achievement is currently unsatisfactory because pupils are following a too easy programme of study. Teachers’ expectations of pupils are too low because they do not make any baseline assessments. At Key stage 4, pupils following a full GCSE course are working to a satisfactory standard, using the Vardean Applied ICT learning system. They respond well to working individually and at their own pace. All other pupils follow RSA CLAIT courses. This is suitable for Year 11 pupils, who are achieving satisfactorily, but for some pupils in Year 10, the course is not rigorous enough; it is to be changed shortly.

91. Lessons are purposeful. Teachers have good subject knowledge and support pupils confidently. Pupils make good progress because lessons are well planned. Teachers support pupils with special educational needs or English as a second language satisfactorily. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and given individual programmes of work, enabling them to make satisfactory progress.
92. At Key Stage 4, teachers skilfully manage groups of pupils, who follow different courses. They use the Vardean system well to facilitate pupils' independent learning, while providing a helpful framework of support. Teachers encourage pupils to support one another and deal with pupils seen not working quietly and efficiently. Most pupils make good progress. They use computers confidently to prepare notes, create PowerPoint presentations and to carry out research.
93. The work in pupils' folders is well presented. They carry out tasks such as text and image processing with confidence, but few describe the purpose of their work or demonstrate an ability to evaluate the outcome. There is little evidence of data-handling tasks or manipulation of data in a spreadsheet at either key stage, although some Key Stage 4 pupils described how to mail merge data from a database into a text document. The more able pupils use a spreadsheet to create an invoice. Pupils' work is marked regularly with helpful comments in Year 9, but at Key Stage 4, completed coursework only indicates where course criteria have been met.
94. The curriculum leader, in post since 2002, manages the subject well. A recent turnover of staff has led to the creation of a new team with good ICT expertise. Teachers have been encouraged to take delegated responsibility for different key stages. A policy document and a development plan are in place, with the priority of developing the curriculum at each key stage. Plans for monitoring teaching and technical support have not yet been implemented. Provision of resources is satisfactory in all ICT classrooms, but there are no interactive whiteboards. Provision for computer control is also an issue and prevents pupils from receiving a full entitlement to the ICT curriculum.
95. The curriculum leader is responsible for ICT across the curriculum. An audit of staff capability and a document mapping ICT against other subjects exist but are out of date and do not reflect that all staff have completed National Opportunities Fund (NOF) training successfully. Most computers are housed in specialist rooms, which discourages some teachers making best use of them.
96. Computer resources are now much improved and meet the needs of the ICT curriculum except in the area of computer control. A curriculum of discrete ICT is now in place for all pupils in Year 9 and Key Stage 4.
97. Since the last inspection, resources have increased and the computer to pupil ratio is now better than the national average. However, as most computers are sited in two main areas, teachers in other subjects are deterred from using them. The provision of four computers in the sixth form study centre is minimal and students tend to use the nearby Independent Learning Centre, which is supervised and open to pupils throughout the day; it has 30 computers. Pupils are also sent there to carry out tasks with teacher permission. This is a well-used resource and enables pupils to work independently.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

98. All subject development plans indicate intent to use ICT in lessons but the level of use by class teachers is unsatisfactory. Some teachers are using ICT for their own use in preparation of resources, and pupils' work shows evidence of its good use to carry out independent research, and to prepare and present work.

HUMANITIES

Geography, history, and religious studies were all inspected fully.

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**, with some good elements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and work to well-structured planning.
- Information and communication technology is used well in Key Stage 4.
- Standards at both key stages are below average.
- There is limited use of assessment data.
- Fieldwork opportunities are not sufficiently developed.

Commentary

99. Standards in the end of Year 9 assessments indicate an improving percentage of pupils attaining level 5 and above. Current work supports this trend. However, standards remain below the national average. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations indicate an improvement over the very disappointing 2002 results, but these results are still well below national averages and below many other subjects in the school.
100. Pupils understand and appreciate the principal factors of location, and grasp the physical and human concepts of their studies, often applying newly acquired knowledge to specific case studies. The majority of pupils work hard and exhibit good presentational and practical skills. This facet of learning was particularly well illustrated by the construction of high quality relief models of Japan by teams and individuals in Year 9. Good collaborative work was a feature of several lessons observed, together with demonstrable inclusion.
101. Pupils at both key stages use ICT to increase their understanding of geographical issues. This was well illustrated by the Year 10 studies of tropical storms, where pupils effectively related the impact of physical phenomena to human geography. The inclusive nature of the learning environment enables all pupils, including those with English as a second language, to make satisfactory progress.
102. The quality of teaching is good; some very good lessons were observed. Staff demonstrate good subject knowledge and an awareness of individual pupil needs; they create good teaching and learning environments in the classrooms. Learning objectives are often communicated directly to the pupils. Literacy initiatives, such as the use of key word games and word displays, and the encouragement of good graphical skills, also make their mark in the classrooms, as does the use of pupils' work on classroom walls. Marking is good and in line with school policy. Considerable priority is given to the collection of pupil assessment data, but not enough use is made of the data to determine future paths for improvement.
103. Leadership across the department is clear and positive, with the teaching and learning well managed. The newly arrived head of department has a clear vision and is very enthusiastic to develop the department at all levels. It is hoped that it will attract a higher take-up of geography courses. There are satisfactory resources available to pupils, but access to ICT resources is not always easy. The accommodation is satisfactory; classroom walls are covered with good relevant display materials, including examples of pupils' work.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because teaching and learning are very good.
- Very good GCSE results in 2002 and 2003.
- Good programmes of study engage and challenge pupils very well.
- Very good classroom practice is not being shared sufficiently within the department.

Commentary

104. Results of teacher assessment for pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2002 are in line with expectation for their age. Results in 2002 at GCSE were above the national average. Pupils taking the course did significantly better in the history examination than they did in their other subjects. The 2003 results are higher than those attained in 2002.
105. Standards of work in Year 9 are in line with expectations for pupils' ages. In Key Stage 4, GCSE pupils produce work and have understanding of history above expectations. They have very good historical skills and their overall knowledge is very good.
106. Pupils in Year 9 achieve satisfactorily, developing knowledge and understanding about the subject similar to pupils of their age nationally. Those who go on to take GCSE achieve well by the end of their course, given their abilities in the subject when they start the course.
107. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They have high expectations of the pupils, expecting hard work and very good behaviour. Careful planning by teachers gives pupils a variety of appropriate challenges and the range of work in courses interests the pupils; the way in which it is presented to them challenges them to think, analyse and evaluate very well. As a result, pupils are very focused in their studies and work exceptionally hard. Year 9 work on life in the trenches is very well designed to give pupils skills in causation. Pupils studying the Suffragette Movement are successfully challenged and the work helps them develop a good understanding of bias and prejudice. Very clear teaching of examination technique strengthens pupils' knowledge of how to raise their own attainment. Work is well differentiated, so that teaching assistants are able to give good support to pupils who are in the early stage of learning English and those with special education needs, helping them make good progress. Good assessment and marking ensure that pupils know how they have gained their marks and what can be added to improve them. This has raised standards in the GCSE substantially.
108. The leadership and management of history are good, but regular monitoring of teaching and learning needs to be developed so that good practice can be shared more fully. Planning is a major strength. The wide range of topics provided gives pupils very good opportunity to consider a variety of spiritual, moral and social issues. The work on the Holocaust, for instance, enables pupils to explore morality and the spiritual nature of life at some length.
109. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. GCSE results have risen significantly to 80 per cent A*-C in 2003. This represents good progress and an increase in uptake of the GCSE course has resulted.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because the good teaching ensures good learning.
- Very good GCSE results.
- A good programme develops pupils' spiritual, cultural, social and moral awareness well.
- Good practice is not being shared sufficiently within the department.

Commentary

110. There was no evidence of teacher assessment of pupils in Year 9 available. Results in the GCSE short course in 2002 were significantly above average. Pupils in Year 9 have religious knowledge, skills and understanding in line with expectation for their age. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' work is above expectation. Most have very good knowledge and understanding of the Christian church, and approaches to religious and moral dilemmas. They also develop in-depth understanding of at least one major world religion.
111. Pupils in Key Stage 4 achieve well. Given their average knowledge, skills and understanding of religious practices, beliefs and values, shown by teachers' assessment when on entry to the course at the end of Year 9, their progress is good. The majority of Year 11 pupils can describe key issues relating to religious moral values from more than one viewpoint. They intelligently evaluate religious attitudes towards issues such as abortion, euthanasia, divorce and racial prejudice well.
112. Teaching and learning are mostly good. When teaching is very good, pupils learn very well because they are challenged to explore ideas. Very good teaching on Buddhism provided many relevant activities that stretched the pupils and made them think, spiritually, about change in their own lives. In a Year 10 lesson, very good use of plastic foetuses was made to make pupils think about the moral issues behind the question, "when does life begin?" Pupils consider very different opinions from their own. They are continually challenged, and through study of the six world religions, they gain a very clear view of other cultures. Collaborative work and listening to the views of others develops them socially. Pupils in the early stages of learning English and those with special educational needs are given good support by teaching assistants in Year 9 and generally make good progress as a result. Good use is made of vocabulary key words to support their development of religious vocabulary.
113. The leadership and management of religious education are good. The commitment and hard work of the specialist team is a considerable strength. Assessment procedures are very thorough and help pupils to gain a good idea of their progress. Marking is good, but a few pupils indicated that it is not always done. Monitoring the effect of teaching on pupils' learning is not yet developed sufficiently to enable good practice to be shared.
114. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The number of candidates entering the GCSE short course has risen significantly. The 2002 results of 78.2 per cent gaining A*-C grade is a remarkable achievement.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well qualified and committed teaching staff.
- Generally good accommodation and resources.
- Overall, examination results are well below average.
- There is no common assessment system, and assessment information is not used well in planning.
- There is a lack of use of ICT to support teaching and learning.
- Links with feeder schools are weak, leading to a lack of continuity in teaching.

Commentary

115. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2002 were well below average when compared to national results for all schools and similar schools. Results for 2003, however, show an improvement on previous years. Girls generally achieve more highly than boys, and the results for graphics are better than other specialist areas.
116. Pupils' attainment in design and technology on entry to the school is below average, because of a lack of previous experience. In 2002, teacher assessments of design and technology confirmed that the number of pupils in Year 9 achieving Level 5 or above was well below the national average. The teacher assessments in 2003 show an improvement. At GCSE, standards were still below average, though pupils have made satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. Standards observed during the inspection are mostly average, although some individual pupils achieve high standards.
117. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and some teaching seen was good. Teachers are well qualified and provide effective support. Some pupils, particularly in Key Stage 4, produce work of a high quality as a result. The degree of planning in individual lessons is good, but long-term planning is unsatisfactory. In some lessons, the pace of learning is slow. Assessment of resistant materials coursework in Year 11 is good; teachers provide a wide range of helpful comments to guide the development of the work. However, there is no common pattern of assessment across design and technology as a whole and little use is made of assessment information. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good, and the majority work hard and concentrate well in lessons.
118. Overall, leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory, although recent appointments of staff to teach resistant materials and graphics have helped to raise standards in these areas. Links with feeder middle schools are weak and, consequently, the knowledge that staff have of the standards and experience of pupils on entry to the school is limited. Currently, there is no subject handbook, and the existing schemes of work lack the detailed information for effective teaching. Much of the work is in the form of focused practical tasks, some of which include a small element of designing. There are few opportunities for pupils to do open-ended designing and making throughout Year 9 and Key Stage 4, and few opportunities for pupils in Year 9 to investigate existing products before designing their own. In food technology, designing takes the form of recipe modification rather than designing with food. Links with industry are limited.
119. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. Insufficient work has been done on progression from Year 8 into Year 9 and beyond. There is still a lack of detailed curriculum planning and insufficient use of ICT to support teaching and learning in the subject. The

department lacks facilities for computer-aided designing and making in graphics and resistant materials. Equipment for computer control exists, but it is old and incompatible with modern computers. Although progress and standards have improved, standards at GCSE are still below average. There is still no common system of assessment.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good variety of teaching methods, including those that encourage the development of independent learning.
- Interesting schemes of work.
- Assessment systems are thorough and consistently applied.
- Pace and challenge in some classes are not sufficiently demanding.
- Opportunities for personal development through oral work, citizenship, multiculturalism and spirituality are underdeveloped.
- There is no specific programme for extending gifted and talented pupils.

Commentary

120. Pupils reach standards that are broadly in line with the national average by the end of Year 9. This represents a significant improvement on earlier years, and is the result of the department's good planning and organisation. Pupils acquire new knowledge and skills in their work in both two and three-dimensional media, and learning is satisfactory. There is a strong emphasis on the development of drawing and painting skills. The department has no reliable information on pupils' attainment when they arrive at the school. Consequently, it arranges tests early in Year 9. This provides information that allows the department to measure pupils' progress as they move through the school.
121. Results at GCSE in 2003 showed an improvement on the previous year, an upward trend that the department has maintained. Overall, the work of pupils in Year 11 is close to the national average. By the end of Year 11, achievement in the use of a variety of media is satisfactory for the majority of pupils. Pupils also improve their skills in mixing and applying paint in a variety of styles, the result of satisfactory teaching and class support. Many pupils have good drawing skills and their work shows their knowledge and understanding of the use of a variety of two- and three-dimensional materials. Their achievements show preparatory and experimental work that is often extensive, well presented, and frequently inspired by a famous artist or movement. Their ability to translate research into finished work of a high standard is far less evident.
122. Pupils learn to work effectively as individuals and in small groups, the outcome of good classroom organisation and management. Teachers set homework linked to classwork and mark it regularly. Pupils know their levels and are familiar with the well-established assessment procedures that point them to improvements. However, pupils who are gifted are not challenged enough to allow their talent to grow. Whilst ICT is included in the schemes of work, access to computers and relevant programmes as a means of supporting and extending work is very restricted in teaching rooms.
123. Teaching is satisfactory but does not always make sufficient demands on pupils' time or levels of productivity and concentration. On one occasion, praise was misplaced and inappropriate for some pupils. This created a false sense of achievement and such practice is an impediment to raising standards.

124. Leadership is satisfactory. The department takes care that it provides an inclusive learning environment for all pupils through its organisation and levels of expectation. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are well integrated and make satisfactory progress. Factors in this are the quality of visual aids and support they receive in class. The subject is satisfactorily managed by an experienced specialist. Organisation and planning are good. Specialist, suited accommodation, including sixth form provision, is very good.
125. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Schemes of work are well organised and interesting, but do not focus specifically on those aspects of pupils' personal development that relate to oral work, spirituality and citizenship. Attitudes and working relationships are good. Many pupils respond to teaching with interest and enthusiasm. They behave well. Art and design make a satisfactory contribution to pupils' moral and social development, as well as to the ethos of the school, through the range of good displays in art rooms and public areas. Spiritual and cultural development both need greater emphasis.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- A high proportion of pupils learn to play musical instruments.
- Extra-curricular groups, particularly steel bands, are well supported and play at high standards.
- The qualities of leadership and management are good.
- The use of ICT is insufficient.

Commentary

126. Teacher-assessed levels of achievement at the end of Year 9 in 2003 showed that a high proportion of pupils achieved level 5 or above, with more girls than boys achieving the higher levels. The proportion of pupils who attained A* - C grades in GCSE 2002 was above the national average. In 2003, the proportion was less but no national figures are yet available for comparison. Fluctuations can occur from year to year according to the abilities of those who opt to do GCSE in music; the department has no minimum requirements for pupils who wish to study the subject.
127. Current standards in Year 9 are average. Pupils' previously acquired knowledge and understanding are not strong in this subject. Nevertheless, because of well-structured lessons, they make rapid progress in composition, as in one lesson involving ground basses and melodies in rondo form. Pupils understand the idea of improvisation and perform their own work on keyboards with confidence. They work well in groups and have a reasonable grasp of the principal elements of music.
128. In Year 11, standards are average; because of good teaching, pupils grasp simple harmony and gain familiarity with the terms tonic, subdominant and dominant in relation to triads and their use in cadences. They are less secure when attempting to sing these notes and chords. Performance skills are at an appropriate level, and pupils are conversant with the work and styles of representative composers. Insufficient use is made of the creative possibilities of ICT. Pupils enter the school in Year 9 from a variety of middle schools with insecure musical attainment; consequently, the accomplishments described above represent good progress and achievement.

129. The quality of teaching is good, being a mix of the experienced and the new. The experienced head of department provides a very good model for the new teacher with well-planned lessons, expertly delivered. . The needs of all pupils are well met. Gifted pupils are not systematically identified but more able performers are well known. The quality of learning matches the quality of teaching and pupils make good progress. A substantial number across the school have individual instrumental lessons, thus enhancing their musical attainment. Many participate in a good variety of extra-curricular activities, including some high-achieving steel bands, and annual shows that are justly held in high esteem by parents and the community.

Example of outstanding practice

Extra-curricular provision seen in Year 9. Over 20 pupils were rehearsing, unsupervised, during a lunchtime break.

A specialist teacher is employed to teach the highly successful steel bands in the school; the senior band has been to Trinidad to perform to critical acclaim. The teacher trains the band during one session and then leaves them to work together before he returns the next time. Year 9 pupils, in their first half term at Biddenham, rehearsed seriously with great concentration and enjoyment a lilting and infectious samba. Through such discipline, they have quickly adopted a mature attitude. Each pupil learns the etiquette of musical socialising and responsibility, and the satisfying intellectual challenge it brings to the joy of making music.

130. The good qualities of leadership and management are evident in the effective organisation and administration of this busy department. Time is generously given to make possible events such as regular lunchtime concerts, and teachers' enthusiasm finds its reward in the whole-hearted support given by the pupils. Planning and assessment is thorough and pupils have a good understanding of how they are doing.

131. Since the previous inspection, teaching, learning and expectations have improved, and the positive qualities noted at the time have been maintained. However, the use of ICT continues to be underdeveloped.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning in dance is very good.
- Leadership and management of physical education is very good.
- Accommodation is very good.
- Good improvement since the last inspection.
- There are good links with the local middle schools.
- Provision for extra-curricular activity is good.

- The standard of written work.

Commentary

132. Standards in Year 9 are in line with the national average; achievement is good because teaching and learning have improved, together with the overall provision. Standards have risen from the time of the last inspection, when they were below average.

133. In GCSE in 2002, standards for physical education were well below the national average. Currently, standards in Key Stage 4 are average in examination and non-examination classes, and pupils are achieving well due to better teaching and provision.

134. The quality of teaching and learning is good in practical lessons in Year 9 and Key Stage 4. In a Year 10 girls football lesson, the teacher seized every opportunity to promote moral and social development during the lesson. Effective teaching ensured that the importance of good sporting behaviour and team spirit were acknowledged, alongside the skills of dribbling, passing, shooting and ball control. GCSE written work, however, contains too many worksheets, and marking is not always rigorous. Inaccurate spellings were observed unchecked, and the standard of presentation was not careful.
135. There are good links with the local middle schools. During the inspection, visiting Year 8 pupils enjoyed a range of activities taught by the staff and sixth form students. The session provided good opportunities for the sixth form to teach the younger pupils, who were eager to gain points for their team in the Krypton Challenge competition.
136. Extra-curricular provision is good. The school is working hard to provide a wide range of sporting and dance clubs. Pupils benefit from good quality teaching in the Year 9 football club, which is well attended and organised. The Tai Kwondu club is also well attended and the good level of instruction contributes to pupils' growing knowledge and competence in this sport.
137. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The subject leader for physical education works closely with the director of sport. The director of sport has a clear vision for raising standards and extending the provision of physical education and dance. New teachers are closely monitored and given clear guidance on strengths and weaknesses; this is helping to raise the quality of teaching and learning. There are good curriculum development plans for dance, sport and physical education. The accommodation is very good as the school benefits from extensive playing fields, including an Astroturf area, climbing wall, sports hall, and gymnasium and dance studio. The school is aware of the need to develop resources, such as the number of balls available for lessons.
138. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good in all aspects of physical education. The provision for examination courses has extended to include dance at GCSE. The school has recently gained Specialist Sports College status and the quality of the accommodation has improved. This is having a beneficial impact throughout the school.

BUSINESS AND VOCATIONAL STUDIES

Business Studies

Provision in business studies is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good specialist teaching, but unsatisfactory teaching by a non-specialist.
- Well below average examination results in 2002.
- Improving examination results in 2003.

Commentary

139. Business studies was sampled at Key Stage 4; two lessons were seen. One was good, the other unsatisfactory. In the good lesson, a variety of activities were used to develop pupils' understanding of different types of business organisation. The lesson was well managed with sufficient pace and challenge to enable pupils to develop understanding and maintain motivation. In the other lesson, the pace was leisurely and pupils were allowed to misbehave. The teacher's subject knowledge was weak and the activity lacked challenge for some pupils. In the sample of work seen, work was well presented and showed evidence of a variety of

tasks pertinent to the course followed. Marking was thorough, providing pupils with helpful guidance to correct and pursue their learning.

140. In 2002, GCSE examination results were well below the national average. Those for 2003 indicate significant improvement in attainment with more pupils gaining grades A*-C.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Pupils' good response.

- Monitoring of teaching and learning is not developed.
- Good practice is not sufficiently shared.

Commentary

141. Standards of work are in line with expectation for pupils of this age. Pupils in Year 9 generally communicate well and develop a sound knowledge of what it means to be a good citizen. In Key Stage 4, all pupils follow the GCSE short course and standards are satisfactory. Pupils acquire knowledge, skills and understanding of many issues that affect their daily lives.

142. Achievement is good. Pupils make good progress in their skills of communication. They become much better informed in their decision-making and base opinions on evidence.

143. Teaching and learning are good. Pupils develop an interest in the subject through the variety of approaches used by teachers and through their work in other subjects, particularly religious education, history and drama. They respond positively in lessons and work hard. They behave well and learn well. Good use is made of outside speakers, who support the work of the teachers. This was seen in a good lesson on "Street crime", through which pupils learned about their rights and how they should deal with being approached by the police. Pupils also have opportunities to improve their communication skills and to argue a case. In a Year 10 lesson, the teacher's good questioning on human rights gave pupils the opportunity to challenge commonly-held views. They made good progress and became much more aware of why society holds specific views and the reasons for the different approaches to sensitive issues, such as disability. The use of Year 11 work experience to undertake a health and safety project also helps individuals explore key issues that they will face in the world of work. Pupils in the early stages of learning English are well supported in lessons, but activities that involve discussion are sometimes too difficult for them to be fully involved with their classmates. Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress and are well supported, especially when working with teaching assistants.

144. The leadership and management of citizenship education are good. The scheme of work being developed by the curriculum leader gives thorough coverage for pupils of all the key issues and skills required. A good course is being developed to produce a more comprehensive programme of study for the short course GCSE. The visits to the magistrates court and criminal court also provide very good opportunity for development, as does involvement in the School and Year Councils. Classes are not disadvantaged when taught by non-specialist teachers because of the hard work and preparation of each lesson by the specialist teachers. There is also a need to monitor carefully how teaching is benefiting learning and to share good practice more fully. The assessment and marking of GCSE work is

being developed well. However, the assessment objectives are not interpreted clearly enough for the pupils by teachers, so that pupils do not always know how to improve their work.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, ten subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. Valid comparisons with other schools cannot be made because numbers taking each subject are too small.

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
Biology	6	83.3	81.6	0	33.2	20	33.2
Business studies	8	100	89.1	12.5	31.7	31.3	35.4
Communication studies	5	40	94.2	0	36.1	14	38.5
Economics	9	44.4	86.2	11.1	41.5	13.3	37
Design and technology	6	83.3	89.2	16.7	32	21.7	30
Mathematics	7	28.6	74.2	0	34.3	31.7	33.6
Other social studies	12	91.7	83.2	16.7	32.5	22.1	34.8

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	6	100	91.6	50	36.3	83.3	74.1
Business studies	8	100	96.4	37.5	32.8	91.6	74.1
Chemistry	6	100	94	50	45.9	96.7	81.1
Communication studies	5	100	98.3	20	36.8	68	81.1
Economics	5	100	96.2	0	45.8	56	83.1
English	4	100	98.7	28.5	44.1	90	84.7
General studies	5	100	90.1	0	29.1	64	69.3
Mathematics	7	100	93.3	71.4	52.2	97.1	84.7
Physics	9	100	92.8	66.7	42.8	95.6	78.6
Health and social Care	8	88.2	90.3	0	16.7	43.5	62.9
Information technology VQ	10	95	86.4	25	28.8	73	68.3

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection in this area was on English literature AS and A-level. English language is not offered. Additionally, one lesson of communication studies A-level was observed. The teaching in this lesson was satisfactory. Students entered the course with attainment at GCSE, which did not form a firm basis for A-level study, and their achievement is at least satisfactory in relation to what they have previously attained.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is rising and achievement is good.
- Teaching is consistently at least good and stimulates an enthusiastic response.
- Students are given good support in understanding their own progress.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Insufficient use is made of the available assessment information.

Commentary

145. In 2002, results in English literature at A-level represented a considerable improvement over the previous year. Although the number of students who took the examination was too small to make valid national comparisons, no candidate attained lower than a grade D and most received the higher grades. The provisional results for 2003 are similar but the attainment of those who had protracted absence overseas was much lower. They do not fulfil the potential of their GCSE grades. The predicted grades for 2004, based firmly on grades received at AS level and on current performance, indicate that standards of attainment are continuing to rise. Standards seen during the course of the inspection indicate that attainment is higher than is seen nationally. There has been improvement in attainment since the previous inspection when it was judged to be broadly average.
146. There is a flexible policy towards students' entry to the AS and A-level courses and a considerable proportion embark on the course with prior attainment in English, which does not provide a firm basis for continued study in the sixth form. Furthermore, previous entry policy to English literature at GCSE has seen some students start the sixth form course without having previously studied English literature at examination level. Students achieve well during the sixth form to reach standards of attainment which compare well to those attained nationally. In general, students' progress is particularly good in understanding and using the techniques and vocabulary of critical analysis to evaluate their texts, and the way in which contextual understanding of the written word enhances interpretation. Students learn well from their wide reading of the work of well-known literary critics.
147. The quality of teaching is mostly good; some was very good. Teachers plan lessons well, with clear objectives. Students know what to expect and what is expected of them. In particular, teachers plan a good range of imaginative activities which stimulate the interest and commitment of students, who approach their work with enthusiasm. There are good opportunities for them to take an active part in lessons and they make good progress through frequent discussion and preparing presentations to be made to the rest of the class. Teachers use these activities to assess progress and identify students who require additional support. Teachers give good support for students in understanding the requirements of the course and the criteria by which their work is assessed by examiners. They also show their students how to improve their work and gain additional marks. There has been good improvement in teaching and methods of assessment since the previous inspection.
148. The leadership and management of the subject are good. There is a strong commitment to raising standards and to offering the opportunity of sixth form study to as wide a range of students as possible. Students' work is assessed regularly and a strong feature of the provision is the practice of giving every student a "mini-tutorial" for the return of marked work, which enables them to understand how to improve their written answers and gives teachers valuable information on the performance and needs of individual students. However, this information is not used sufficiently to predict or assess the progress which pupils make

throughout the course. There is a good programme of enrichment of the curriculum through regular theatre visits and attendance at specialist sixth form seminars. There are no detailed schemes of work in the sixth form, so less experienced teachers are given additional support and guidance, as necessary.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

149. Across the sixth form curriculum, literacy is satisfactory. Most students who take A-level courses are native or fluent English speakers, though there are some who are acquiring the language. In history, good use is made of discussion, which is frequently demanding. In other subjects, teachers were seen explaining language to help students progress. In a chemistry lesson, for example, the teacher made it easier for students to understand the structure of carbon compounds by going into etymology and then explaining with reference to other English words. Literacy is not so well used in health and social care, where students' knowledge of essential terms was seen to be insufficient to enable them to understand key concepts.

MATHEMATICS

The provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The achievement of students in the sixth form is good.
- The quality of the teaching of AS and A-level mathematics is good.
- Some of the students who are re-taking GCSE are not able to attend all the planned classes because of conflicting classes in their programmes. This works against them achieving a satisfactory outcome.
- The school does not offer a suitable key skills course in mathematics for those students who gained lower grades at GCSE.

Commentary

150. The small number of students who completed A-level in 2002 achieved good results; only two AS level candidates gained grades in the same year. A-level results in 2003 were similarly good and AS results improved. Due to the variable entry level for AS, some students do not have sufficiently good GCSE background for the course.

151. Standards and achievement in Year 12 are currently below average. In an AS class seen during the inspection, students were using a computer programme to carry out an investigation into the way graphs of quadratic functions change shape as the algebraic equation is altered. In a statistics lesson, they also used the computers to apply spreadsheets to the calculation of variation and standard deviation of distributions. In both classes, some students readily understood the concepts whilst others needed additional support. In particular, those students whose prior study at GCSE was for the intermediate examination found greater difficulty with the algebraic skills involved. Several of the students had only average skills in ICT. Two formed the class for further mathematics, studying the AS topics in decision mathematics. These students had a very good understanding of the concepts involved in the analysis of networks. Standards in Year 13 are good and students are achieving well. The four students studying the binomial expansion in one lesson, showed good algebraic and analytical skills, commensurate with good grades at A-level.

152. The teaching of A-level is good overall with three-quarters of the lessons seen being good or very good. The teaching of small groups is in a tutorial style that promotes students' own study skills. Teachers have a good level of understanding of the subject and use this to promote analytical discussion. They make good use of ICT, though they lack a data projector

or inter-active whiteboard. The application of ICT to the teaching of graphical functions in one lesson, for example, enabled students to carry out an investigation that would have been laborious by other methods. They were therefore able to concentrate on the concepts involved rather than on routine calculations. The textbooks used throughout the course support students' individual study, with very clear explanations, extensive worked examples and exercises to complete. Teachers are beginning to apply approaches to teaching drawn from the Key Stage 3 Strategy, such as oral and mental starters to lessons and plenaries that summarise what has been learned. Students are given a clear indication of what they need to study out of the lessons in order to make good progress.

153. The curriculum for AS and A-level has been re-planned recently in line with the latest changes in the syllabus and the department is considering how the breadth of study offered can be increased. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has improved. Teachers have good subject knowledge, the curriculum is well organised and the range of teaching styles appropriate.
154. The school enables students who have gained lower grades at GCSE to retake the examination to improve their grade to a C or above. A large number of students follow this course in Year 12. The improvement rate for such students has not been good in the past. Although a well-defined GCSE revision programme is available, not all students are able to attend all the planned classes, due to clashes in their timetable with other subjects. In the class observed, around a quarter of the group are likely to gain C grades in January, with a few more achieving this in June next year. However, this will be difficult for some, and an alternative Key Skills course in mathematics would be more appropriate.

Mathematics across the curriculum

155. In other subjects, sixth form students apply their numeracy and graphical skills successfully in a number of situations. In an A-level geography lesson, students collated data and drew hydrographs, which enabled them to extend their understanding of geographical concepts. In their study of child development, the students in health and social care applied their knowledge to construct good quality graphs of breathing and pulse rates. In science, for example, students use logarithms in reaction rate equations.

SCIENCE

The focus was on physics but chemistry and biology were also sampled.

Physics

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The well above average A-level results, offset by the lower than average standards in AS-level examinations produced by less able students.
- The presence of a highly-qualified and experienced subject teacher.
- Good use of Internet-based homework exercises to develop independent learning.
- The good working relations between students and teachers.
- The existing scheme of work needs updating.

Commentary

156. In 2002, the department's A-level results were high in relation to all schools nationally. A similar performance is likely in the 2003 results. However, at AS level, the average points score is below the national average. Although a high proportion of students gain A-C grades, a significant number fail the course. A similar situation also applies across the other science subjects at AS level. Some students are being accepted onto these courses without receiving appropriate advice.
157. Standards of work seen in Year 13 indicate that students are making satisfactory progress and their levels of achievement are broadly satisfactory. Of particular note is the quality of coursework produced by the higher-ability students. In one lesson, students investigated capacitor discharge and relationship to half-life value. They were confident in the handling of apparatus and calculated combination values for capacitors in series and parallel. They also developed an understanding of the significance of errors in results. The work of students in Year 12 shows that many are already developing a good interest in the subject. Standards are about average for the beginning of the year.
158. The quality of physics teaching is generally good, though occasionally it is adversely affected by the small size of a teaching group. In the more successful lessons, students are encouraged to contribute their ideas, so consolidating their learning and understanding. This happened in a demonstration on photoelectric effect, where the students took relevant readings and analysed the data. The teacher interacted well with the students, giving appropriate levels of support and challenge. In both year groups, a relaxed teaching style, coupled with humour, is used to good effect, and creates good working relations between the teacher and students. The students also co-operate well with each other. The retention rate for students studying physics is high and nearly all who are successful at AS continue with the subject in Year 13. This is indicative of their interest in the subject and their confidence in being able to reach their target grades.
159. Accommodation is satisfactory, although the provision of an interactive whiteboard would enhance learning. Little mention was made of physics in the last report. The department functions well, other than for having an outdated scheme of work. The number of students studying the subject is comparable with those for chemistry and the fact that the Year 12 group contains three female students is encouraging, since few have studied physics in recent years.
160. The leadership of physics is good and the head of department has a clear vision about how to develop the subject and teaching. The subject leader is particularly active in promoting the use of the Internet and web facilities to develop independent learning-style homework activities. However, this teacher also has extensive responsibilities within the school's senior management team, which limit developmental work within the physics department.

Biology

161. A-level biology results in 2002 were above the national average and broadly in line with students' capabilities. Students did less well in biology than in their other subjects, though in 2003 results have improved. At AS level, the 2002 results were in line with the national average. Two well-paced lessons were observed. In one, the good teaching on the removal of metabolic waste included an opportunity for the students to dissect a kidney. In the other lesson, the use of the digital projector helped stimulate an interest in the topic. The two teachers display a knowledgeable and confident manner. Both lessons included a range of activities designed to develop the students' key skills and maintain their interest and involvement. Homework set is well matched to the lesson and designed to ensure that all students make good progress in their learning and understanding of the topic. As a result, they achieve well. Of particular note is the recent large increase in the number of students currently studying AS biology, leading to two groups of excessive size.

Chemistry

162. A small number of students take A-level chemistry and, although they gain A-D grades, the sample is too small to make valid national comparison. Larger numbers take AS-level, but a few fail. The spread of results is close to the national average. Two lessons were observed. In Year 13, students were learning about stereo isomerism and its significance in nature and the drug industry. Teaching was very good and students achieved well, aided by the teacher's emphasis on real life applications. Similar expertise was seen in a Year 12 lesson in which students learned how to write balanced chemical equations and use them to calculate amounts of substances involved in chemical reactions. The lesson was notable for the simple way a complex subject was presented. All students successfully met the lesson objectives and achieved well.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision for information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results at A-level.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and classroom management.
- Effective teamwork among staff.

- Examination results at AS level.
- Insufficient range of ICT activities.

Commentary

163. Examination results for A/VCE ICT in 2002 were good. The small group of students all passed. Provisional examination results for 2003 show that internal standards have been maintained. A comparison of such a small group with national results is meaningless. At AS level students succeed less well. In 2002, just over half of those entered for AS/VCE gained a grade A-E. However, provisional results for 2003 indicate students have reached higher levels of attainment and results are much improved.

164. In lessons observed, students demonstrated their knowledge of ICT and used computers with confidence to carry out suitable tasks successfully. In one lesson, they were developing their knowledge of programming with Visual Basic, using decision-making commands with some confidence, some boys better than girls. In another lesson, students were successfully upgrading hardware and software for a computer system. In a GCSE re-sit group, students were preparing a presentation of the features of the Vardean learning system they use and achieving a satisfactory standard. Some failed to appreciate the underlying needs of their audience, however, and so were less successful in the task.

165. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons well and employ suitable teaching methods to interest students and enable them to learn effectively. Most time is spent in individual learning with the teacher free to support and encourage students as needed. Students use their time effectively and use the computer system confidently. Samples of student coursework show good evidence of students capable of annotating their printouts to reach satisfactory solutions. Students manipulate text, images and video clips well. However, there was insufficient evidence of students completing data handling, modelling or control tasks to make a judgement on achievement in these skills.

166. Leadership and management are good. The curriculum leader leads the teaching team effectively and has established clear lines of responsibility for managing and developing sixth form programmes of learning. Since the last inspection, AS-level and A-level ICT courses have been introduced and a significant number of Year 12 have opted for the courses offered.

Performance data are used well to determine the needs of individual students and frameworks for learning are established for those students to make progress.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

167. ICT is used widely by sixth form students as a tool for carrying out research in various subject areas and for the preparation and presentation of work. Evidence of using ICT in lessons was plentiful. Digital cameras, for example, were used in science to record experiments, and in art and design, and design and technology, to carry out research. Two good sixth form lessons were seen in mathematics where students were using computers to support learning of quadratic equations and using spreadsheets to understand standard deviation.

HUMANITIES

History and geography were inspected in full. Religious education was not inspected, but it was evident that sixth form provision does not meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus.

Geography

The provision in the sixth form caters for five students following AS and A level courses.

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning.
- The department is well led.
- Information and communication technology is well used.

- Overall standards are unsatisfactory.
- Fieldwork opportunity is limited.

Commentary

168. Examination results in recent years are variable, with AS level producing two A grades and a U in 2002 and just one low pass in 2003. At A-level, results are similarly varied: in 2002, three passes were all low, but in 2003, the two candidates gained A and B grades. Entry numbers are too small to compare reliably with national statistics; students perform in line with their capability.

169. During lessons, students showed satisfactory levels of knowledge and understanding of concepts and processes in both human and physical geography, and made satisfactory achievement. Standards seen were about average. Students are well focused, applying newly acquired knowledge and skills to practical problems, for example in applying hydrological discharge data to contrasting environments. Group dynamics are positive, with good student-teacher relationships creating a good learning environment. Information and communication technology skills were not observed in lessons, but were clearly apparent in work files and research project evidence.

170. Teaching is good throughout, with results at whatever level reflecting hard work by students and teachers. Very challenging and well-informed teaching engages the students fully, bringing out good responses in both conceptual understanding and the acquisition of knowledge. Students are well motivated by good teacher support and encouragement, with staff giving marked consideration to the specific needs of individual students. A feature of the learning environment is the sharing of learning objectives and expected outcomes. Teachers mark work thoroughly and provide supportive comments and judgements. They have high expectations and challenge students to think about issues. However, experiential awareness

of key geomorphological features is not properly enhanced because of a limited structured fieldwork programme.

171. The department is led satisfactorily by a newly-appointed head of department, who has an enthusiastic vision for the future development of both teaching and learning. Resources are satisfactory and readily available to students. Access to ICT resources is not always easy, although students manage to use them well when they have the opportunity.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is rising and achievement is good.
- Teaching is good.
- Leadership and management are good.

- Demanding and prolonged discussion is sometimes too challenging for some students.
- Insufficient use is made of assessment information to measure progress.

Commentary

172. In the A-level history examination in 2002, there were insufficient candidates to enable valid national comparisons, but students performed well, with none attaining less than C grade; most gained grades A or B. This is similar those of the previous year, which were above the national average. The provisional results for 2003 indicate that these standards have been generally maintained, with one grade D and all other students attaining grades A-C. The results predicted for 2004 indicate that standards will rise, with more students attaining grades A and B. These predictions are based partly on results at A-/AS-level, in which there was a high percentage of grades A and B. The attainment of current students is above that seen nationally.
173. The flexible entry policy to the A-level course allows some students to start the course having obtained lower than average results at GCSE. Achievement in the sixth form is good, however, and students generally fulfil or exceed the potential indicated by previous results. Students make particularly good progress in using a very complex range of historical information to understand, analyse and explain historical situations. They also make good progress in becoming familiar with the ideas and theories of a very wide range of well-known historians to enhance and extend their own understanding. The wide use of the work of respected historians is a particular strength of the subject at this level. Students' achievement in developing an appropriately objective and formal tone in their written answers is good, despite this being a skill which many find particularly demanding.
174. The quality of teaching is good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which gives confidence to students who find the subject challenging. They give clear explanations and offer good support to students. Students seek to understand the requirements of the course and the way in which marks are awarded, so that they understand how to maximise their marks. Teachers' good use of sources helps students recognise that history is open to a number of interpretations. They plan lessons well and include an appropriate range of activities; good use is made of discussion, which is frequently demanding and intense. Students make generally good progress in response to close questioning or detailed discussion, but occasionally some students find this too difficult. This is especially so when a teacher's support arrives too late. Students' written work is marked regularly and their progress is recorded meticulously.

175. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department is committed to raising standards and ensuring students achieve according to their capabilities. Teachers use well their meticulous recording of students' strengths and weaknesses to let them know how they can improve their grades. Schemes of work are detailed but flexible, providing good guidance to less experienced teachers while enabling teachers to respond to the changing needs of students. There is a good range of resources which enable students to refer to a wide range of textbooks and the work of well-known historians. Although there are no trips in the sixth form to places of historical interest, all students have the opportunity to attend a good range of specialist history seminars. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

Design and technology was inspected in full. The department offers courses in product design, textiles and food technology.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of work from present students is improving.
- Standards are still below average.
- There is a need for more detailed planning of schemes of work.

Commentary

176. Results in the examination in 2002 were low in all subjects at AS and A-level, and they continued to be low in 2003, except in AS level product design, where one-third of students entered gained grades A to C. Achievement is unsatisfactory.

177. Few higher ability students have followed the courses in recent years, but the current group of product design students in Year 12 includes students of higher ability. In the past, students have produced coursework folders of high quality; this trend is continuing in product design. There is work of high quality in textiles and in resistant materials; several students have developed design and drawing skills as a result of good teaching.

178. In the lessons seen, teaching and learning were satisfactory. Individual lesson planning is good but long-term planning is insufficiently developed, especially in food technology and textiles. Staff recently appointed to teach resistant materials are rapidly attending to the need for a new scheme of work, which is not yet the case in textiles and food technology. Students' attitudes are good and the majority enjoy the course. Their response to the teaching is good.

179. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory overall, despite the absence of the head of department, due to the work done by the resistant materials specialists, who are already ensuring that students work hard to raise achievement. In other respects, leadership and management follow that of the subject in the main school. There is a lack of resources for computer-aided designing and making, and this restricts the range of work which students can do.

180. Since the last inspection, insufficient action has been taken to raise standards. Attainment of students in sixth form courses is still below average.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Drama and art and design were inspected in full; music was sampled in two lessons. Standards in music are above average. All students achieved passes at AS and A-level in 2003. Teaching and learning are very good.

Art and design

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Independent learning skills are well developed.
- An interesting curriculum with additional good learning opportunities.
- Good resources and very good specialist accommodation.
- Teaching is not always sufficiently challenging in pace and learning outcomes.
- There is little lively engagement of students in the learning process.
- Examination results are below average.

Commentary

181. In the 2003 A-level examination, 50 per cent of the group of ten candidates achieved A - E grades and 20 per cent of them achieved A and B grades. There have been too few candidates in previous years to enable valid national comparisons. Many students did not reach their potential.
182. Current standards are below average and students are not achieving their best. Independent learning skills are well established. Students have learned how to research and analyse textual material, and to discuss and debate fluently in groups, using specialist vocabulary. Students have also learned to explore and select visual information for a wide variety of sources, in response to an interesting variety of themes. Their work is always closely related to individual artists or artistic movements. This gives additional breadth to their knowledge and understanding. Some strong individual styles are emerging. Research and experimentation, with a wide variety of media, is often extensive, but their levels of achievement in this preparatory work do not often translate into finished work of a high standard.
183. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall - good on occasions - but lacks drive and challenge in the pace of work and levels of expectation. There is little lively or enthusiastic engagement of students by teachers in the learning process. Assessment is thorough and helpful. Teachers have created an attractive specialist environment for sixth form learning which has a good range of resources, including ready access to a computer.
184. Leadership and management of the course are satisfactory. However, the approach to teaching is insufficiently rigorous. Several students are not actively engaged in their work to achieve their artistic and creative potential.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good subject knowledge is combined with very good selection of teaching methods to ensure that students develop well as individuals.
- ICT is very well used to increase students' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students elicit a very positive response from students, who take mature responsibility for their own learning and achieve well.
- Greater recruitment to the subject at all ages is needed.
- The curriculum is not developed enough at present to include more technical skills, such as sound, lighting and design.

Commentary

185. Results at AS and A Level indicate good achievement. Most Year 12 students have entered the sixth form with good grades in GCSE in drama, but several did not take GCSE. Nevertheless, all are achieving very well in the first few weeks of the course in performance, drama theory and theatre history. The subject makes a very valuable contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of students and they were all confident that drama had contributed to significant gains in their personal development in the sixth form. All sixth form students were observed achieving very well in a wide range of drama assignments.
186. In all three lessons sampled, teaching and learning were very good. The teacher's expectations are high and students respond very well. The teacher's command of the subject is excellent; the pace of the lessons is brisk, and students are challenged to respond quickly and accurately with good solutions to the tasks set. These factors contribute to the very high achievements. All students were fully engaged physically, intellectually, creatively and socially in all aspects of the course. The sequence of lessons ensures that all gain from a good range of educational opportunities, with a very good mix of theory and practice, including devising and performing, Internet research and work on theatre history and drama theory. Technical ICT skills of a high level are being taught, for example, the recording and editing of work on a digital editing suite. Students are trained to contribute to discussions, to lead activities and to join in an evaluation of what they had achieved; this leads to a significant growth in their personal maturity.
187. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The new head of dance and drama has changed the syllabus at GCSE level, and is ambitious to develop the subject further, both in the sixth form and right through the school. Recruitment to sixth form courses has increased significantly. Retention from AS to A-level is 100 per cent, and these courses are now taught solely in school. The curriculum is challenging, interesting and meets all examination requirements. Partnership with other schools is developing very well. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good with a wide range of clubs, rehearsals and theatre visits. Large numbers of pupils take part in school productions, which include two plays and one musical each year.
188. Developing as an autonomous subject, drama has made very good improvements since the last inspection. It is no longer taught in consortium arrangements with other schools and viable teaching groups have grown at the school. The new head of the subject continues to develop the subject as intellectually and creatively challenging. The numbers of students choosing drama has increased significantly and it is building on its success. Drama continues to improve.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

Physical education was inspected with an emphasis on dance. The school used to belong to a consortium for sixth form courses, but since it has become a sports college, all teaching now takes place on site. Pupils are currently studying for AS and A level PE/sports studies and dance.

Provision for dance is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make very good progress in AS and A-level dance.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Pupils are encouraged to identify their own targets to evaluate their work effectively.
- Sharing of the best practice throughout the department will enable pupils in all examination groups to benefit from a variety of teaching styles and presentations.

Commentary

189. Over the last five years, the number of students taking AS Level and A-level sports/physical education has been too small to make a national comparison. AS and A-level dance have recently been introduced; in 2003, the five students who took AS level all passed. The standards observed in Years 12 and 13 are average. Students in the AS and A-level dance class make very good progress. This is particularly commendable, as they did not study dance at GCSE level.
190. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Dance students identify their own targets, expectations are identified clearly and a good range of different teaching methods are used, encouraging both independent and collaborative work. In a year 12 AS dance lesson, the teaching was excellent. The lesson plan was meticulous and incorporated a range of prepared worksheets and diagrams that used a variety of styles and presentations to promote learning. There was also a highly effective work card that incorporated the use of a partly constructed notation task, designed to consolidate pupils' learning of the complex concept of Labanotation. Pupils of average ability reached very good levels of achievement that were developed further through a homework task that required them to purchase different food types through the web site of a major food retailer.
191. The standards of written work in dance are better than those seen in physical education. Some senior dance pupils are encouraged to assist in lessons for the younger years, supporting those who are less able or less confident than their peers. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to perform dance. The extra-curricular programme provides dance technique classes and an A-level clinic. Showcase evenings give students the chance to perform dance and drama in public.
192. The leadership and management of dance are very good. Dance and drama are managed together in performing arts association. This has benefited the range and breadth of extra-curricular activities offered and future curriculum planning, which includes the possibility of introducing a performing arts GCSE.

BUSINESS EDUCATION

Business Studies

Business Studies was sampled. One A-level lesson with two students was seen. It was a good lesson because the teacher used a variety of activities to develop students' understanding of market

research roles, including notes displayed on an overhead projector, role play and Internet research to draw out understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of carrying out market research. The sample of work seen was well presented and showed evidence of a variety of tasks pertinent to the course followed. Marking was thorough, providing students with helpful guidance to correct and pursue their learning.

Recently, sixth form students had great success in a Young Enterprise competition among Bedfordshire schools to set up and run a business enterprise. They have a well-presented copy of company accounts.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Provision in health and social care overall is **satisfactory**.

Main Strengths and weaknesses

- The AVCE course meets the needs of students wishing to enter the care professions.
- Good teaching.
- Students learn good personal skills from visits and work placements.

- Some students do not make as much progress as they could over time.
- Students do not use ICT enough.
- Curriculum planning does not meet the needs of all students, particularly on the Access course.

Commentary

193. Health and social care is well established as a one or two-year AVCE course in which students can opt to take three, six or 12 units. An Access course is also run over one year for students whose GCSE grades are too low for AVCE. .
194. Overall, standards in sixth form health and social care are average. Results in the AVCE in 2002 were below school and national expectations, with none of the eight students entered gaining the top grades. Results in 2003 (unconfirmed), though disappointing, were close to national expectations for pass grades and the number of higher grades obtained by the 14 students entered. Students' achievement from their GCSE average points scores, which tend to be lower than for students taking other sixth form subjects, was satisfactory for the majority, especially considering this is a new subject for nearly half of them.
195. In lessons and work seen, students were attaining standards close to average, although, as this inspection was early in the new course, Year 12 students have not yet produced written work in appropriate depth. Access students produced a daily diary of their diets, highlighting strengths and weaknesses reasonably effectively. Some students, including those with English as an additional language, showed insufficient knowledge of essential terms, such as metabolism, or of the importance of a balanced diet. Year 13 students have already undertaken weekly day placements and used the experience effectively to produce word-processed reports on their communication skills with clients. Some evaluations were too brief, and folders showed insufficient examples of practice exercises using ICT to present and analyse data through drawing graphs or modelling diet data. There were, however, some very high-class notes and diagrams on the genetics module.
196. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' relationships with students are very supportive, and these help to keep students well motivated to persevere with their tasks. Teachers organise visits to local care settings and bring in useful speakers on health topics. In a good Year 12 lesson, students were fully involved in role play to prepare for their one-to-one interactions with clients in local care settings, supported by the experienced teacher's topical anecdotes. Teachers' prompt and constructive marking of students' assignments enables them to learn from their mistakes and improve their work to get higher grades. The close-knit

experienced staff team has worked well to make the best use of school accommodation and learning materials. The subject area is well managed and led, and has good capacity for further improvement, given more flexible timetabling to allow for regular student work placements. It is not possible to gauge improvement since the last inspection, as the subject was not reported on.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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