

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ALDRIDGE SCHOOL**

Aldridge

LEA area: Walsall

Unique reference number: 104263

Headteacher: Mr A Harrison

Lead inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas

Dates of inspection: 27 - 30 September 2004

Inspection number: 268727

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1312
School address:	Tynings Lane Aldridge Walsall, West Midlands
Postcode:	WS9 0BG
Telephone number:	01922 743988
Fax number:	01922 740119
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr K Holland
Date of previous inspection:	21 September 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Aldridge School is an 11-18 comprehensive school with specialist Science College status. There are 1312 pupils in the main school and 181 students in the sixth form. This makes the school much bigger than most other schools with sixth forms. There are about the same number of boys and girls in the school. Although the school provides for pupils across the ability range and attainment on entry is average overall, there are fewer pupils at the upper end of the attainment range. This is because a significant number of pupils from the four main contributing primary schools take up places at the local grammar schools. The school provides twenty specialist places in Year 7 for pupils with an aptitude for music. The proportions of students with special educational needs and with statements are below average. Pupils with the highest levels of need mostly have moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties or specific learning difficulties. About ten per cent of the pupils have minority ethnic backgrounds. Around 13 different minority ethnic groups are represented in the school and there is no significantly large sub-group. While many of these pupils are bilingual, none are in the early stages of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

### Sixth form

The sixth form comprises 181 students. It is bigger than most other sixth forms and the number of students has been stable over recent years. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students who choose to continue in full-time education at age 16 is above average. Students are offered a range of 23 Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced level (A-level) courses and one Vocational course. Standards on entry to the sixth form are broadly average.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3390	Ken Thomas	Lead inspector	
14214	Gillian Smith	Lay inspector	
10905	Alan Brewerton	Team inspector	Biology (sixth form) Physics (sixth form)
11838	Derek Cronin	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
19414	Janet Flisher	Team inspector	Media studies (sixth form)
4372	Ralph Fordham	Team inspector	Citizenship Religious education
15051	Lynne Kauffman	Team inspector	Design and technology Design and technology (sixth form)
1240	John King	Team inspector	Art and design
10417	Kevin Lambert	Team inspector	Science
11548	David Lee	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics (sixth form)
8052	Kenneth McKenzie	Team inspector	Business education (sixth form) Information and communication technology
19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History History (sixth form)
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Music Music (sixth form)
19452	Anthony Pearson	Team inspector	Physical education Physical education (sixth form)
11300	Barry Smith	Team inspector	Special educational needs Geography
15372	Patricia Walker	Team inspector	English as an additional language English English (sixth form)

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Ltd

Demeter House  
Station Road  
Cambridge  
CB1 2RS

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The school is satisfactorily effective and provides satisfactory value for money.** It provides a quality of education that has many good and some very good features. Teaching and learning are good. Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. Leadership is good but management is unsatisfactory.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school has identified and is beginning to tackle many of the weaknesses in management.
- Standards in English, mathematics and science, at the end of Year 9, have risen sharply and achievement is good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- There has been significant recent improvement in the collection and analysis of assessment information, but not enough use is being made of this information to monitor pupils' progress and raise standards.
- Provision is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular activities, excellent provision in music and Science College status.
- The structure of the timetable impedes continuity in teaching and learning.
- The good attitudes and behaviour of the vast majority of pupils make a significant contribution to the ethos of the school.
- There is a lack of rigour in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, and inconsistency in the implementation of school policies and plans.
- Provision for religious education does not meet the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus in Years 10 and provision for citizenship education is unsatisfactory.

The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Statutory requirements with regard to information and communication technology (ICT) are met and provision for pupils' spiritual development has improved. Some progress has been made with regard to the information provided to parents, but more needs to be done. The marking of pupils' work has improved, but the weaknesses in the use of assessment remain. Teaching and learning have improved and there is now more good and better teaching. Standards have risen at the same rate as results nationally. Action has been taken to improve the effectiveness of staff with management responsibilities, but this weakness remains.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

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

Standards are average and **achievement is satisfactory**. Standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science have risen. The 2004 National Curriculum test results, taken at the end of Year 9, are above the average test results obtained in 2003 (the latest year for which national comparisons are available). Standards at the end of Year 11 are average. GCSE examination results in 2004 were below those obtained in 2003, which were above average overall. The achievement of sixth form students is satisfactory. Standards in GCE A-level examinations in 2004 were similar to those obtained in 2003, when they were average overall.

The attitudes and behaviour of pupils in the main school are good. Those of students in the sixth form are very good. The number of exclusions is average for a school of this size. **Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good.** Attendance is very good in the main school and good in the sixth form. Punctuality is good both in the main school and in the sixth form.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION

**The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good** with much that is very good and some that is excellent. The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. The structure of the timetable impedes continuity in learning in several subjects. Good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs and gifted and talented pupils. Provision to enrich students' learning outside lessons is very good. Support and guidance and links with parents are satisfactory. Good links with the community and other schools and colleges enhance provision. Because of difficulties in recruitment there are weaknesses in staffing in a few subjects. Accommodation is satisfactory.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The **leadership of the school**, including that of the headteacher and other key staff, **is good. Management is unsatisfactory.** The school has not made enough use of evaluation information to identify strengths, and weaknesses have not been tackled with sufficient urgency. Governance of the school is good. Despite the best efforts of governors, because of accommodation difficulties the school is unable to comply with the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of corporate worship.

## PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are generally satisfied with the school, although a number have concerns about the behaviour of pupils in some lessons, the information the school provides and the use of homework. Inspectors found that behaviour in most lessons is good. However, there are instances of disruptive behaviour, mainly by boys, in some lessons. Homework is generally used effectively. Inspectors agree that more frequent information could be provided to parents.

## IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Assessment information is used effectively to monitor pupils' progress, evaluate performance and guide planning.
- The school timetable promotes continuity in teaching and learning.
- There are rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, and ensuring the consistent implementation of school policies and plans.
- Pupils receive their full entitlement to citizenship education.

and, to meet statutory and other requirements:

- Ensure full coverage of the Locally Agreed Syllabus in religious education in Year 10.
- Provide a daily act of collective worship.

## OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE SIXTH FORM

**This is an effective sixth form.** Examination results, which overall are average, reflect students' attainment levels on entry in Year 12. Leadership is good and, although there are some weaknesses, management is satisfactory. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The sixth form is cost effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The head of the sixth form is very dedicated and highly regarded by the students.
- The sixth form offers a good range of AS and A-level courses that are well suited to the needs of most students.
- Not enough use is made of tutors in the support, guidance and monitoring of students' academic and personal progress.
- Students have very positive attitudes and a desire to succeed. They make a good contribution to the life of the school and the community.
- Teaching and learning are good and a very high proportion of students gain the qualifications necessary to pursue their career ambitions.
- The school does not fulfil its statutory duty to provide a daily act of corporate worship for students.

## 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	<b>Satisfactory</b> in English. Standards are average and achievement satisfactory with lower attaining students achieving well. Teaching is good. Management is unsatisfactory.
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory</b> Examination results were average in 2003, broadly in line with predicted grades. Good teaching and positive attitudes lead to good learning.
Science	<b>Very good</b> in biology. Examination results were above average in 2003 and improved in 2004. Teaching is very good which leads to very good achievement by students. <b>Very good</b> in physics. Examination results were above average in 2003 and improved in 2004. Teaching and learning are very good and assessment is used very well to track the progress of pupils.
Humanities	<b>Very good</b> in history. Very good teaching leads to good achievement. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject.
Engineering design and manufacturing	<b>Satisfactory</b> in product design. Examination results in 2003 were average. Good teaching results in creative design thinking.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Satisfactory</b> in media studies. Results at A-level are broadly in line with predicted grades. Teaching and learning are good and students have very positive attitudes towards the subject. <b>Excellent</b> in music. Standards are improving and achievement is good because of the excellent teaching.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<b>Very good</b> in physical education. Examination results were above average in 2003 and improved further in 2004. Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well.

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*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**

Sixth formers are provided with satisfactory advice, support and guidance. They receive good support from their subject teachers but there are weaknesses in the monitoring of their progress through the sixth form as a whole. Provision for the few students with special educational needs is good and support for students at an early stage of learning English is very good.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM**

**Leadership of the sixth form is good. Management is satisfactory.** The head of sixth form is highly dedicated to her students' welfare. She knows them as individuals and they praise her concern and commitment but, because so much of her time is devoted to their personal welfare and progress, not enough attention is given to the monitoring of their academic progress.

### **STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM**

The vast majority of students enjoy being in the sixth form and appreciate the efforts of the head of sixth form and their teachers. They consider that teaching is challenging and that they are expected to develop independent work habits. They value the accessibility and commitment of their subject teachers and say that help is always available when they need it. They feel that they are fully involved in the life of the school and enjoy the opportunities to take responsibility.

Some concerns were expressed in the responses to the student questionnaire. Most of these focused on support and guidance, both when making decisions about their Year 12 subjects and about future educational and career paths. In discussions during the inspection students agreed that they are provided with careers advice but some of their other concerns were confirmed by inspection findings.

A further concern focused on behaviour, racial harmony and relationships. However, in discussion there was general agreement that relationships between students and with teachers are very good and that the sixth form is a harmonious community.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in subjects and courses**

Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are above average at the end of Year 9. The 2003 GCSE results were above average in most subjects and achievement was satisfactory. However, 2004 results were below those obtained in 2003 and below the school's target for the year group. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. The 2004 results are comparable with those obtained in 2003, which were average.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results in the National Curriculum tests, taken at the end of Year 9, in English, mathematics and science rose sharply in 2004.
- Most pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9 from average attainment overall on entry to the school.
- Pupils' language and literacy skills are above average.
- Not enough use has been made of assessment information to raise achievement by identifying where pupils might be falling behind so that action can be taken rapidly.
- Most sixth form students obtain the examination results necessary to pursue their career ambitions.

#### **Commentary**

1. Standards of attainment on entry to the school, although covering the full attainment range, are broadly average. However, the intake is slightly imbalanced. There are fewer pupils at the upper end of the attainment range because a significant number of pupils from the main contributing primary schools go to selective grammar schools at the end of Year 6.
2. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 because the National Key Stage 3 strategy is being implemented effectively and there is a substantial proportion of good and better teaching that inspires the pupils to do well. Pupils attend well and show much commitment to their studies. Similar strengths in provision are seen in Years 10 and 11. However, not enough use has been made of assessment information to identify potential underachievement and to plan individual intervention for pupils who are falling behind. This has had an adverse effect on achievement at the end of Year 11, which is not as good as at the end of Year 9. One of the recently appointed deputy headteachers has tackled this weakness as a matter of priority. As a result, there has been a significant improvement in the analysis and dissemination of assessment information, and the need to ensure the more effective use of this information to raise achievement is recognised.
3. The trend in the school's National Curriculum test results did not match the rate at which the national results rose from 1999 to 2003. However, the school's results improved significantly in 2004. The 2003 results (the latest year for which comparative information is available) were average overall. Results in science were above average, while those in English and mathematics were average. In comparison with schools in similar socio-economic circumstances results were average in science, but below average in English and well below in mathematics. In comparison with schools in which pupils attained similar standards at the end of Year 6, results were above average in science and average in English. Results were below average in mathematics. Following the 2003 results, raising standards in Years 7 to 9 was identified as a school improvement priority and the 2004 results in English and mathematics showed a sharp rise. The 2004 results in science were similar to those obtained in 2003. A feature of the 2004 results is that significant proportions of pupils in each of the core subjects attained the higher Level 6 or above. This indicates that the school is working effectively with higher attaining pupils. Consistent with the difference observed nationally girls generally outperform boys in English. The performance of boys and girls in mathematics and science is broadly similar. The achievement of pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds is comparable to that of their peers.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.5 (35.5)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	35.8 (35.9)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.9 (33.4)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 268 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

4. GCSE examination results rose at about the same rate as results nationally over the period from 1999 to 2003. The 2003 results achieved the school targets and were above average both for the proportions of pupils obtaining five or more grades A\* to C and five or more grades A\* to G. Value-added measures, based on pupils' test performance at the end of Year 9, show that the achievement of this cohort of pupils was satisfactory. However, the school did not meet the targets set for 2004 and the proportions of pupils obtaining five or more grades A\* to C and five or more grades A\* to G were below 2003, as was the average points score. School analyses show that the drop in the results was largely because a number of pupils in the average and above average attainment groups did not achieve as well as expected. Although the achievement of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is generally comparable to that of their peers, amongst the pupils who underachieved in 2004 were a small number of minority ethnic pupils who failed to gain their target grades by a considerable margin. Shortly before the examination the school identified that a number of pupils were likely to underachieve and these pupils were provided with additional support. However, the intervention was too late to have any significant impact on their performance. Action is now being taken to ensure much earlier identification and intervention.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	57 (55)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	92 (94)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	37.2 (36.8)	34.7 (34.8)

*There were 253 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

5. In 2003 the percentage of pupils gaining A\* to C grades was above average in English language, English literature, biology, chemistry, physics, history, music and physical education. The percentage in mathematics and double award science (the examination most pupils take) was average. Apart from business studies and religious education where the percentage was below average, the percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades in other subjects was average. Girls outperformed boys in all subjects other than biology, chemistry, physics and geography where performance was about the same. The differences in performance between boys and girls generally reflect differences in performance observed nationally.
6. In contrast to 2003, the 2004 the percentage of pupils gaining A\* to C grades fell in English language, English literature, mathematics, geography and physical education. In other subjects the percentage gaining the higher grades was about the same as in 2003, apart from art, design and technology and modern foreign languages, where the percentage rose.

7. Inspection evidence is largely consistent with the test and examination results and shows standards to be above national expectations in science and in line with expectations in English and mathematics. Standards are mostly in line with expectations in other subjects apart from geography, history, modern languages, music and physical education where they are above.
8. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good because procedures for identifying and supporting pupils are effective. They receive good teaching in subjects and good specialist support and guidance. Almost all of the very few pupils with English as an additional language are fluent English language speakers and achieve as well as others in their classes. Effective additional support is provided where necessary and so progress is good. The school also provides a wide programme of extension activities for pupils who have been identified as gifted and talented. They benefit considerably from these activities. These pupils achieve well in their academic subjects and this achievement is enhanced further through the programmes.

### **Sixth form**

9. The 2003 A-level examination results were average overall. In subjects where the number of entries was large enough to make comparisons with national averages, results were well above average in economics and above average in biology, business studies, chemistry, geography, history, mathematics, physics, physical education and religious education. Results in other subjects were average apart from English, French and classics where they were below. All candidates obtained grades in the A to E range and achievement was satisfactory when students' attainment at the end of Year 11 is taken into account. The overall performance of male students in 2003 was above average and above that of females. However, there are no consistent differences in performance between males and females. Although there was a drop in the average point score per student in 2004, the results were broadly comparable to the results obtained in 2003. Almost all students obtained passes in the A to E range and there was a rise in the percentage of students gaining higher A or B grades. These results again represent satisfactory achievement. Results in AVCE business studies in 2004 were similar to the results obtained in 2003, which were average.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	94.3 (95.1)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	31.3 (32.4)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	265.3 (264.1)	258.2 (263.3)

*There were 99 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Comparisons with national results in previous years are not available because of a change in the system of awarding points.*

10. The 2003 AS level results were well above average in design technology, science for public understanding and media studies, and average in art, English literature, biology, geography and history. In other subject the number of candidates was too small to make meaningful comparisons with national figures. The 2004 AS level results are generally comparable to those obtained in the 2003 examinations.
11. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory overall. There is much challenging teaching and the students are very well committed to the courses and to their work. However, the benefits of these strengths are not fully seen in students' achievement. This is mainly because, although assessment information is plentiful and staff know the students well, the information is not being used to evaluate and monitor the progress of individuals with enough consistency. Furthermore, some students enter the sixth form having only just satisfied the

entry requirements in terms of their GCSE grades. These students are not able to achieve as well as others because they are not well suited to the predominantly AS and A-level courses available.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. The number of exclusions is about average for a school of this size. Attendance is very good in the main school and good in the sixth form. Punctuality is good and most lessons start on time. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Attendance is well above the national average in Years 7 to 11 and time keeping during the school day is good.
- The school is working hard to stamp out bullying; any racist incidents are dealt with very firmly.
- Relationships between pupils and with adults are good; this contributes to the school's positive ethos and good climate for learning.
- Pupils' social development is very good; they enjoy using their initiative and they relish responsibility.

### **Attendance**

#### ***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)***

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.0	School data	0.3
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

### **Commentary**

12. Pupils are proud of their school and they enjoy taking part in the many opportunities available. The overwhelming majority of pupils arrive promptly at the start of the school day and the timetable makes allowance for the time needed to move from one lesson to another. As a result, most lessons start promptly and this enables teachers to make full use of the time available.
13. Pupils' attitudes are generally good and most come to school wanting to learn and eager to make the most of their opportunities. In the vast majority of lessons they respond well and are supportive of each other. However, in a few lessons a small number of pupils, mainly boys, can be disruptive, especially when taught by new or temporary teachers. Other pupils are frustrated by this behaviour because it impedes their progress. In order to further improve standards of behaviour, the school rules have been discussed with groups of pupils from every year group and by the house and school councils. Pupils appreciate being involved in this way and through this process have contributed to the revised behaviour and anti-bullying policies. As a result, most pupils willingly observe the school rules. However, there is fairly widespread non-compliance with the school rule regarding the way in which school uniform should be worn and many teachers tolerate this. Analysis of the pre-inspection questionnaire showed that over half of the pupils had concerns about the general standard of behaviour and around three-quarters indicated that they knew of incidents of bullying or racial harassment. Inspectors discussed these findings with groups of pupils from each year group. In these discussions pupils expressed surprise at the findings and said that the findings did not present an accurate reflection of day-to-day life within their school. Younger pupils feel well looked after and pupils in Years 10 and 11 agree that the general standard of behaviour improves as they move through the school. Pupils say their respective heads of house and form tutors are very approachable and that they would feel able to speak to them if they had any particular problems. Pupils are constantly encouraged to report any instances of bullying and initiatives such as the 'bully box', the newly introduced anti-bullying web

address and the Year 11 'PALS' scheme are proving to be a success. During discussions with inspectors, pupils from minority ethnic groups said that they are well looked after and that there are few incidents of racist behaviour and any that do occur are dealt with very quickly and effectively by staff.

14. Pupils with special educational needs generally demonstrate very positive attitudes to school and appreciate the support they receive. They work well together and are very willing to help each other. This is often seen during lunchtime activities in the special needs area. When withdrawn for small group teaching, pupils make rapid progress because they work hard and relationships are very good. In a few lessons, however, attitudes and behaviour are less positive. This generally occurs when the learning activities are not well matched to their attainment levels with the result that they become disinterested and behaviour deteriorates.
15. The school is committed to ensuring that all pupils are in full-time education. Nevertheless, the challenging behaviour of some pupils inevitably leads to exclusion from school. As a result there were 61 fixed term exclusions and one permanent exclusion in the last school year. These figures are below average for a school of this size. All exclusions are well documented and the school involves parents as much as possible in order to prevent such behaviour recurring.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of students*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1339	52	1
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	19	4	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	7	2	0
Black or Black British - any other Black background	1	1	0
Parent/pupil preferred not to say	21	2	0

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

16. Provision for spiritual and moral development is good. Improving provision for pupils' spiritual development was a key issue at the previous inspection. The school has made good progress since that time in promoting pupils' self-knowledge and spiritual awareness. Where opportunities are provided for reflection and discussion of spiritual matters, pupils show respect for the views of others and most are willing to share their thoughts and feelings. Lessons seen in art, English, history and religious education, for example, provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on issues of belief and morality. However, the school lacks a co-ordinated cross-curricular approach to this aspect of pupils' personal development. Assemblies and tutor times rarely provide a moment for prayer or personal reflection and there is inconsistency in the extent to which subject teachers take advantage of the opportunities that arise to nurture pupils' spiritual development.
17. Provision for pupils' social development is very good and this contributes well to their progress. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to contribute to the life of the school. Through the school and house councils, for example, and through older pupils taking on roles as school prefects and mentors, they are able to express their views and develop an understanding of what it means to be responsible members of the school community. In lessons pupils relate well to their peers, work confidently in pairs and groups, and most are keen to contribute to class discussion.

For example, good levels of collaboration were seen in music, physical education and in English lessons. Cultural development is good. Pupils have a good appreciation of their own and others' cultural traditions, which is fostered through visits and outside speakers as well as in many lessons.

### **Sixth form**

18. Sixth form students are well motivated in their studies and eager to learn. In lessons they apply themselves to their work diligently and show respect for their teachers. Most are willing to take on the opportunities the school provides for them to take responsibility and this encourages students to grow into mature young adults. Students are responsible for much of the organisation of house activities. They help in the library, act as mentors for younger pupils and as guides and car parking attendants on open evenings. All students are expected to assist duty staff at lunchtime, but find this difficult at times because of the inconsistency with which different teachers interpret school rules about access for younger pupils to various parts of the building.
19. Attendance and punctuality are good, although there is some lateness first thing in the morning. This reflects students' opinion that registration time with their tutors is not particularly valuable. There are very good relationships between sixth form students and their teachers and the sixth form is a harmonious and happy community.

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. It is particularly good in relation to the quality of teaching and learning and the very good range of enrichment opportunities the school provides. Other than weaknesses in the provision for citizenship education, non-compliance with statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of corporate worship, and the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education in Year 10, there are no major shortcomings in provision. Good links with other schools and colleges enhance provision. Links with the community are also good.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school and in the sixth form. Not enough use is made of assessment information to plan teaching, guide pupils' progress and raise standards.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school has recognised the weakness in the use of assessment information and action is being taken to tackle this.
- Positive relationships and teachers' very good subject knowledge help pupils to make good progress in lessons.
- The principles of the National Key Stage 3 strategy are applied effectively in Years 7 to 9.
- Teachers' encouragement of pupils and effective use of resources stimulate pupils' interest in lessons.
- Sixth form students are fully engaged in their learning because of high expectations, brisk pace and very good challenge.
- In the sixth form and in the main school there is some inconsistency in marking and assessment because there is not enough monitoring of practice.

## Commentary

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 163 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
15 (9%)	53 (32%)	58 (36%)	32 (20%)	5 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

20. The school has worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning over the last year. The teaching and learning group, with very good support from the local education authority, has established a climate in which the sharing of ideas of how to improve teaching and learning is becoming part of the culture of the school. As a result, teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. Although the judgement that teaching and learning are good is consistent with the judgement made in the last inspection report, there is now more very good and excellent teaching. At the time of the last inspection the quality of teaching was very good or better in about one in six lessons; it is now very good or better in about one in three lessons. Teaching is excellent in about one in ten lessons. The work on developing teaching and learning is now being led by one of the recently appointed deputy headteachers who sees the embedding of an evaluative approach to teaching and learning, with more consistent monitoring by heads of department, as being central to raising achievement.
21. Teaching and learning are judged to be good in all subjects, including English, mathematics and science. In most lessons, teachers use their subject knowledge very well to encourage and engage pupils. Teachers plan their lessons well and learning objectives are made clear so that pupils can see where they are heading. This, together with other approaches originating in the National Key Stage 3 strategy, makes a significant impact on pupils' motivation and does much to promote equality. Most lessons have a clear structure and get off to a brisk start.

### Example of outstanding practice

#### Teaching in art

In a Year 10 lesson the objective was to improve pupils' observational drawing skills by drawing a pair of shoes. Pupils were shown a Van Gogh painting of his own shoes and invited to say why the painting was like a self-portrait. They were quick to respond saying the shoes were a workman's shoes, and that's how Van Gogh saw himself. They were then shown some of Van Gogh's drawings and were asked to look at the expressive marks. They were then required to do six studies, three minutes each, of sections of the reproduction. They used conté or charcoal pencils, both of which were new to them. They worked feverishly in silence and completed the task on time. Each were then given a pair of children's shoes and told how to arrange them. Clear guidance using one of the teacher's own drawings of the same subject showed them exactly what to do. Continuous guidance to the whole class and sensitive individual support ensured that pupils of all attainment levels made equally rapid progress. A very positive yet challenging rapport was maintained with the class throughout the lesson.

22. In the majority of lessons good progress is made because pupils rise well to learning tasks that extend them. Teaching of this quality was seen in almost all subjects and particularly in the excellent lessons observed in art, German, mathematics, music and religious education. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from the enthusiasm and expertise of teachers, and are also offered a suitable range of extension activities. This is an improvement since the last inspection. By contrast, teaching in a small number of lessons suffers because the teachers do not exert enough control, have unclear aims or do not fully engage the pupils. In these lessons pupils' concentration wavers and behaviour deteriorates. In most subjects, the effective use of homework to consolidate and extend pupils' learning makes a positive contribution to their progress.

23. Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good. Teaching assistants have a good knowledge of the needs of their pupils and use this knowledge well to provide them with effective support. When pupils are withdrawn for teaching in small groups, teaching is good and often very good. Pupils' individual education plans contain suitable academic and personal targets that help them to make good progress in their learning. The very few pupils with English as an additional language are fluent English language speakers and do not need any additional support.
24. Although the improvement in teaching is having a clear impact on pupils' progress in lessons it is not having as much impact on their achievement as it should. This is mainly related to weaknesses in the use of assessment to diagnose individual pupils' needs, monitor their progress and to guide teaching and learning strategies. The marking of pupils' work and the use of assessment were identified as key issues for action in the last inspection report and although there has been a recent significant improvement in the analysis of assessment information there is a great deal of inconsistency between subjects. In modern foreign languages, science, art and ICT the marking of pupils' work is thorough. Strengths and weaknesses are noted and targets for improvement are set. However, in English, mathematics, history and religious education, marking does not give pupils clear enough guidance on how they can improve. There is no assessment of pupils' progress in citizenship. There is a lack of consistency in the arrangements for the oversight and monitoring of these processes by heads of department.

### **Sixth form**

25. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. During the inspection teaching was never less than satisfactory and there was a significant proportion of very good teaching. There were examples of excellence in biology and history and all the teaching observed in music was excellent. Strengths include teachers' very good subject knowledge, even in subjects such as media studies where teachers are not specialists. This knowledge and understanding underpins the enthusiasm that characterises many lessons and leads to students' very good engagement in their learning. Teachers generally have high expectations and plan activities that effectively challenge and support students in their learning.
26. The major weakness in teaching is the application and use of marking and assessment. There is some good practice in some subjects, but equally there are subjects that do not adequately or systematically show students how to improve. For instance in some subjects, comments on students' work refer closely to examination board assessment objectives and grade descriptors to make it clear to students exactly why marks have been gained or lost and what they need to do to reach a higher grade. Other subjects make little use of these methods and rely too heavily on unexplained ticks and encouraging remarks. These differences occur because of inconsistent approaches to monitoring by heads of subjects and senior staff. It also explains why achievement is only satisfactory even though teaching and learning are good because some underachievement by students is not picked up during the course.

### **The curriculum**

The curriculum is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Enrichment through extra-curricular activities is very good. The school is well staffed and has a good level of learning resources. Accommodation is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The range of subjects provides well for the aspirations of pupils and their parents.
- The structure of the timetable is unsatisfactory because it fails to promote continuity in teaching and learning.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- The curriculum is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
- The quality of careers education is very good.

- There is a very good range of AS and A-level courses but very limited opportunity for students who wish to follow a vocational path.
- The size of sixth form groups varies widely and this creates some inequality of provision.

### **Commentary**

27. The curriculum is responsive to the preferences of pupils and provides equal access to a satisfactory range of opportunities. Curriculum provision has improved since the last inspection. This is seen in the successful bid for specialist Science College status and the recognition of the good quality of provision in sport, by the achievement of the Sportsmark award. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good, with all National Curriculum subjects taught. Higher attaining pupils learn a second foreign language in Years 8 and 9, and with the exception of these pupils and those who are specialist musicians, all pupils take drama. In Years 10 and 11, option blocks are based on pupils' preferences. New vocational courses in ICT, leisure and tourism, business studies and health and social care mark a good start in responding to requirements for work-related learning. This builds on very good provision for careers education, enhanced by well-established arrangements for work experience for all pupils in Year 10. The school's Science College status has enabled it to strengthen its arrangements for transition from the primary schools, which are very good in the core subjects. There are some elements of innovation, for example single gender groups and early GCSE entry in some subjects, where it is perceived that this will improve pupils' progress. However, there are currently no arrangements for progression in vocational courses into the sixth form.
28. Curricular provision is monitored regularly by the senior management team, and by governors, who have links with each subject area. Consequently there has been good progress in rectifying weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. This is particularly evident in the improved provision for ICT, which is now having a positive impact on teaching and learning in all subjects. However, the school does not comply with the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship. This was also the case at the time of the last inspection. There are weaknesses in the provision of citizenship education. The school has carried out an audit to ensure that the citizenship curriculum can be covered as a cross-curricular theme. However, there is no monitoring system to ensure that the citizenship curriculum is actually taught and no procedures for assessing and reporting pupils' progress and standards. Not enough curriculum time is allocated to religious education to cover the Locally Agreed Syllabus in Year 10. A major weakness in curricular provision lies in the structure of the timetable. An unnecessarily large number of teaching groups have two or more teachers, which impedes continuity in learning in several subjects. This is most apparent in French and German. Because of staffing difficulties in design and technology, additional curriculum time has been allocated to modern foreign languages. This has resulted in an increase in the number of lessons taught in these subjects and a consequent increase in the number of classes shared between teachers. In its admission arrangements for Year 7, the school provides 20 places for pupils with an aptitude for music. Provision in music is excellent, although the need for special arrangements for these pupils puts a further pressure on timetabling. The recently appointed deputy headteacher with responsibility for the curriculum has identified a review of the school timetable as an improvement priority.
29. The school makes good provision for gifted and talented pupils, in particular for those with aptitudes in the performing and expressive arts, and sport. As part of the strategy for raising aspirations and achievement the school is keen to ensure that the needs of these pupils are met. Each department has a co-ordinator for the gifted and talented and identifies its own gifted and talented pupils. The school has also appointed a teacher with overall responsibility for gifted and talented pupils who organises extra activities to further enhance those provided in lessons and in the extra-curricular activities. During the last school year, pupils in Years 8, 9, and 10 were required to devise a series of projects within a given time frame. The results were considered very successful with many of the topics being relevant to individual departments within the school or to the school neighbourhood. One group's survey on the Aldridge area features in all the local estate agents, whilst another group made an introductory video for newcomers to the school. Effective use is made of assessment both to identify those gifted and talented pupils who do not meet targets, and to check that work provides enough

challenge. Departmental provision for these pupils is excellent in music and very good in physical education and science.

30. Many pupils take advantage of the very good range of enrichment activities that the school provides and achieve high standards. Opportunities for pupils to participate in the arts are very good with an outstanding contribution through music. Very strong features of the extra-curricular programme are the dance, drama, music and sporting activities and competitions that are provided through the house system and organised by sixth form students. These make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning and personal development. Many subjects offer opportunities for pupils to further their interests or boost their learning in lunchtime or after school clubs, thus contributing effectively to the school's results. There are many opportunities for pupils to take part in field trips and educational visits at home and abroad.
31. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. A number of pupils are withdrawn from lessons in order to concentrate on extra reading and writing. This is arranged so as to ensure that disruption to lessons is minimal. Pupils at all stages on the school's list of pupils who have special educational needs are well provided for and the school's procedures comply with the Code of Practice. The co-ordinator and other staff use their knowledge of pupils' achievements in order to plan future targets and the individual education plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that targets reflect the progress made.
32. The match of teachers to the demands of the curriculum is generally good. However, because of difficulties in staff recruitment in design and technology the amount of curriculum time allocated to the subject has had to be reduced and this restricts the breadth of the curriculum in Years 7 to 9. Teaching and learning are well supported by good technician and other support staff. The library is staffed by a full-time librarian who provides a very good resource for research and independent learning. Special needs support staff are effectively deployed and make a good contribution to pupils' learning. Administrative, caretaking and cleaning staff make important contributions to the day-to-day functioning of the school.
33. The provision of resources for learning is good. Over recent years a significant investment has been made in ICT to support teaching and learning. Access to computers is much improved and effective use is made of interactive whiteboards in many subjects. Significant improvements have been made to the accommodation since the last inspection. The new science block provides a highly stimulating learning environment for teaching and learning and the older laboratories are gradually being refurbished. Very good facilities now exist for geography and these are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. In geography the classrooms are situated in close proximity and very good displays of pupils' work help to create an appropriate learning environment. However, history lessons are distributed across a large number of classrooms and this makes it difficult to access and share resources. The accommodation for physical education, which includes two gymnasiums as well as a sports hall and extensive outdoor facilities, is very good and used effectively to promote achievement. Amongst the ongoing accommodation difficulties the school faces is a shortage of specialist rooms and the fact that many classrooms are too small for the number of pupils in teaching groups. In music, for example, a number of lessons have to be taught in ordinary classrooms because there are not enough specialist teaching rooms and the library is too small for a school of this size.

### **Sixth form**

34. The curriculum provides well for students who wish to take a range of AS and A-level subjects but vocational courses are now limited to one AVCE in business, a reduction in provision since the last inspection. Students who wish to follow a vocational path and those who want to improve their GCSE grades across a range of subjects take up places in colleges of further education, a route followed by 62 students last year. This decision has to some extent been forced on the school because of the limited accommodation. Nevertheless, students do regard this as an inequality in provision. Good provision is made for the few students with special educational needs, but little use has been made so far of the Advanced Extension Awards (AEA) to challenge the highest attaining students. However, after

contacts with Oxford University last term, the head of sixth form intends to consider how best the AEA can be employed in future.

35. There is a good range of enrichment courses in Year 12 that lead to AS level only. These include citizenship, general studies, and science for public understanding. These are well regarded by students although some of them run with very small numbers. For instance, in Year 12 in 2003-2004 there were two groups taking science for public understanding catering for a total of 15 students, whereas some full A-level subjects, such as history and government and politics among others, cater for larger numbers in a single group. This is another example of inconsistent departmental practice leading to inequitable provision for teachers and students. A further weakness is that curriculum decisions are sometimes taken without due consultation with subject departments.
36. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities including skiing trips, musical tours, plays, dance festivals and a Christmas Fair. These activities add to the good community ethos in the sixth form and support students' all-round personal development very well.

### **Care, guidance and support**

Arrangements to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety have improved since the previous inspection and are now very good. The school provides satisfactory support, advice and guidance and involves pupils and students well in its work and development.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The house system helps to ensure that pupils are well known and very well looked after.
- Health and safety, and child protection procedures are very good.
- Pupils' academic progress is not monitored closely enough and this leads to underachievement in some subjects.
- Very well planned and thoughtful induction procedures help incoming Year 7 pupils to settle quickly.
- The head of sixth form knows her students well and is very highly regarded by them.
- Guidance and support for sixth form students within academic courses are good but there is no one who has an overview of students' progress across the curriculum.
- Sixth form tutors do not play a consistent, active role in monitoring students' academic or personal progress.

### **Commentary**

37. The house system forms the linchpin of day-to-day school life and helps to ensure that pupils receive good personal support and advice. As a result they are very well looked after during the school day. During discussion, pupils confirm that they feel well looked after and say that they appreciate their teachers. Working relationships are good and any concerns held by individual members of staff are referred to the relevant head of house. In addition pupils who are experiencing particular difficulties receive support from the learning mentor or the learning support centre. The school is in the process of extending the roles of heads of houses and house tutors to include oversight of pupils' academic progress as well as their personal development. As part of this process heads of houses are piloting a scheme in which they will take responsibility for the oversight of a particular year group and a review day is planned for November, during which heads of houses will meet with pupils to review their progress and set targets for improvement. Child protection and health and safety procedures are thorough and members of staff fully understand their responsibilities. Close liaison with a wide range of external agencies ensures that pupils with special educational needs enjoy ready access to suitable advice and guidance.
38. Liaison with contributing primary schools is close and pupils in Year 7 speak warmly of the support they receive. They say that the induction arrangements have helped them to settle quickly into the school. Links with the primary schools are strengthened through the school's status as a science college. Teachers regularly visit their primary colleagues in order to collaborate on curriculum matters

and Year 6 pupils visit the school for science lessons. Links are also close in physical education, music and design and technology, and bridging projects are undertaken in English, mathematics and science. These close links ensure a smooth transfer between the primary and secondary phases and help incoming pupils to form friendships at an early stage.

39. The use of assessment information to support pupils' progress varies between subjects. There is good practice in science, for example, but in most other subjects there is not enough rigour in the use of assessment information to set targets and monitor pupils' progress. Tutorial periods and the PSHE programme reinforce pupils' personal development. Careers advice is helpful and a number of tutorial periods in Years 9 and 11 are devoted to information and discussion about Year 10 and post-16 options. Parents and pupils appreciate the help given.
40. One quarter of the pupils who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that they feel the school is not interested in their views. Inspectors disagree; the school is keen to involve them as much as possible and pupils have been actively involved in the recent revision of the school behaviour code. House and school councils are highly regarded and they recently organised an anti-bullying awareness week. They also help to organise inter-house competitions and charity fund raising events. Pupil representatives also took part in the procedures leading to the appointment of the new deputy headteachers. Pupils' opinions were also recently sought through a survey of various aspects of school life. Inspectors feel that the opportunities for pupils to express their views are good and that the school takes account of these views.

### **Sixth form**

41. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. However, although there is good guidance by subject teachers, the only formal procedure for reviewing how students are progressing across all their subjects is the end of year interview with the head of sixth. In the interview, performance in Year 12 and in AS examinations is reviewed and the choice of A-level subjects determined. Students find this interview very useful but it is very time consuming for the head of sixth. Tutors do not have a formal role to play in the tracking and monitoring of students' progress. They tend to be bypassed by students and subject teachers and this is a real weakness in the system. Students openly say that they regard tutors as register markers. In addition, they clearly do not think highly of the use made of the morning registration period and inspection evidence confirmed that this time is not used constructively enough.
42. A high proportion of students was quite critical in the students' questionnaire of the advice they receive in Year 11 about choice of AS subjects and about what they should do after they leave school. In discussions during the inspection most students agreed that careers information and advice are available for those who seek it but that they have to take the initiative. They do not feel that this is unreasonable. Students also praise the head of sixth form's knowledge about higher education institutions and courses and the quality of the advice she gives. There is, however, some validity to their criticisms about sixth form choice. Subject choices are organised in five timetable slots of which one contains subjects that lead

only to a qualification at AS-level. Although the school points this out to students not all of them realise the full implication, that if they make one of their choices from this slot they will effectively deny themselves any choice of which subjects they will continue to study to A-level.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The school's links with parents are satisfactory. Links with the community and other schools and colleges are good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents provide very good support for their children's learning and this helps them to make good progress.

- Constructive links with other schools and the community enrich the curriculum and strongly support pupils' personal development.
- The quality of the information provided in pupils' annual reports varies between subjects.
- Sixth form students are effective ambassadors for the school in the local community.
- The school makes good use of its links with Birmingham and Wolverhampton Universities to extend students' knowledge and understanding of higher education.

### **Commentary**

43. The school has the confidence of all communities. It enjoys a very good reputation and is heavily over-subscribed. Analysis of the pre-inspection questionnaire shows that parents are pleased with many aspects of school life and almost everyone who returned their form agrees that the school expects their children to work hard and do their best. Parents encourage their children to attend regularly and they nearly always arrive on time. Parents' wholehearted support is reflected in a level of attendance that is well above the national average. The parents' association provides generous financial support and the funds raised help to enrich the curriculum through the provision of additional learning resources. Parents' attendance at the annual consultation meeting is good and they provide very good support for the Year 9 options evening, school concerts and other musical events. Pupils are encouraged and motivated by the support they receive from their parents.
44. The school's status as a specialist science college creates many opportunities to engage and interest pupils, parents and the wider community. The school enjoys very close links with its main contributing primary as well as with other secondary schools. Teachers participate in common training days and there are strong links with other specialist colleges within the language, technology and sports sectors.
45. Parents are very interested in their children's education and they support them very well at school and at home. The quality of information the school provides for parents is satisfactory. Through curriculum evenings, for example, parents are helped to understand what their children are doing. Parents express concern that the annual report does not provide enough information on their children's progress and that the reports are sent out too late in the school year. The school does not send out mid-year reports. Inspectors agree with their concerns and find that the information provided in the reports varies between subjects. Parents are free to contact the school any time they have concerns and are appreciative of the fact that heads of houses will always respond to parents' enquiries. The 'link' book does not serve as an effective means of communicating between home and school. Some tutors regularly monitor the books and respond to any comments made by parents, but others do not. The parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept very well informed of their progress and personal development. Newsletters and the school prospectus are well produced and informative.

## **Sixth form**

46. Good links exist with the community and higher education. Music, business and physical education make very good use of the local community to enrich their students' experience. For instance, musicians perform regularly to a wider audience, and physical education students help with sports activities in local primary schools. Those students who are considering teaching as a future career are able to spend time in primary schools to reinforce their decision. Students raise money for local charities as part of the school's annual Charity Challenge and some visit a local residential home for elderly people at Christmas. Through these various activities sixth form students contribute to the school's good reputation.
47. Although students are expected to organise their own visits to university open days, speakers from Birmingham and Wolverhampton Universities are brought in to school to talk with students about higher education and to give advice about how to get most benefit from a gap year.
48. Reports to parents are inconsistent. Some are well focused and give reasonably precise and manageable targets while others are not so informative and focus insufficiently on attainment and achievement.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The leadership of the headteacher and that of other key staff is good. The management of the school is unsatisfactory. The school does not make enough use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher has guided the school successfully through a period of transition and to the achievement of Science College status.
- The recently appointed deputy headteachers have strengthened senior management and are very keen to ensure that the processes of evaluation and review become firmly embedded in the school procedures.
- The quality of leadership and management in subjects is variable. Exemplary subject leadership in music has a clear impact on standards.
- Leadership by the head of sixth form is good.
- There is not enough monitoring of the use of sixth form tutor time and its effectiveness.
- Governors provide the school with strong support.

### **Commentary**

49. The head teacher has a clear vision for the educational direction for the school and a high commitment to pupils and staff. He has successfully led the school to Science College status and created the conditions for an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Although the school has only been a Science College for about a year, there is already evidence that this is having a positive impact on standards and the overall provision. In particular, improvements in links with local primary schools are having a positive impact upon teaching and learning in Years 6 and 7. There has also been a positive impact upon accommodation with the building of four new laboratories and in curriculum provision by the introduction of new courses such as Science for Public Understanding.
50. The senior leadership team is in a stage of transition following the retirement of one deputy headteacher and the impending retirement of another. Innovative use has been made of Leadership Incentive Grant funding to smooth this transition. Two new deputy heads have been appointed to overlap with those being replaced. This has both smoothed the transition and enabled the new deputies to take action on school improvement priorities more rapidly than might otherwise be the case. The benefits are already seen, for example, in the high quality analysis of performance information and the dissemination of this information to staff in ways in which the implications for the planning of teaching

are easily understood. The deputy headteachers provide the head with very strong support and are firmly committed to raising standards and achievement.

51. The management of the school is unsatisfactory. The weaknesses stem from a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities with regard to monitoring and evaluation. This lack of clarity is apparent at all management levels and leads to a great deal of inconsistency in the implementation of school policies and plans. While there are examples of very good management in music, modern foreign languages and science, management in English and citizenship is unsatisfactory. There are also weaknesses in management in most other subjects. Most of these weaknesses relate to a lack of systematic monitoring so that potential underachievement has not been identified at an early enough stage to take remedial action. This school has recognised this weakness and action is now being taken to tackle it. Good management of special educational needs enables staff to work well together to ensure that provision is good.

### **Example of outstanding practice**

#### **Subject leadership in music**

Under the outstanding leadership and management of the head of music this department has become one of the most successful in the school and is making a major contribution to the academic progress and personal development of every pupil. His inspirational leadership skills are reinforced by the deep subject knowledge of a practising musician and a wealth of experience in drawing the best from pupils. He conducts a tireless and continuous search to find means of providing pupils with new and thought provoking musical experiences. As a result pupils are fully engaged in lessons, achievement is high and standards have risen. The head of department provides an excellent role model for staff and pupils alike.

52. Governors are very supportive of the school and carry out almost all of their statutory duties. Governors are conscious of the need to provide a daily act of collective worship but because of accommodation difficulties are unable to comply with the statutory requirement. They are clear about the nature of the school and keen to maintain its traditions. Governors work closely with the school and are developing a much clearer understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They fully endorse the principle of ensuring that the school provides for the needs of all groups of pupils. This provides the headteacher and senior leadership team with a great deal of confidence in planning new developments. Governors monitor the budget with care and as a result financial management is good and expenditure is targeted according to priorities in the school improvement plan.

#### **Sixth form**

53. The head of sixth form leads the sixth form with dedication. She knows her students well and has an informal overview of their progress. She is personally involved with each student, interviewing them at the end of Year 12 to review their progress and plan their programme for Year 13. She provides a very good role model for staff and students through her commitment to students' welfare. There is, however, some confusion in her role, which is designated as purely pastoral, despite the fact that she takes some major curriculum decisions. In addition, she has too many responsibilities, including having direct oversight of all students' UCAS applications. This heavy load means that she does not have the time to induct a regularly changing team of tutors. As a result, not enough use is made of tutors in tracking and monitoring students' progress. This situation has come about because although the number of students staying in the sixth form has increased, the role of the head of sixth form has not changed to accommodate this.
54. There are several inconsistencies in the way in which departments work in relation to sixth form students. For example, some departments make good use of assessment and performance information, while other departments have only a limited understanding of how this information can be used to raise achievement. Departments are also inconsistent in the way that they make decisions on the minimum

and maximum size of groups. This leads to inequalities for staff and students. The school is now aware of this situation and is seeking to address it.

55. Nevertheless, the sixth form is effective in that students are happy in the school, attainment is average and achievement is satisfactory which leads to a judgement on management as satisfactory despite some weaknesses.

### Financial information

#### *Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003*

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,377,312	Balance from previous year	264,065
Total expenditure	4,343,527	Balance carried forward to the next	297,850
Expenditure per pupil	2,884		

### WORK RELATED LEARNING

#### **What is the effectiveness of work related learning?**

56. The school has made a good response to new requirements for work-related learning (WRL), and provision is **good**. The policy for WRL is very well considered and statutory requirements are met. The school has very good procedures for work experience in Year 10, with all pupils having placements and benefiting from very good preparation and follow-up. Access to careers information, via Connexions, careers interviews and a very well appointed careers library, is very good. An audit has been conducted of the actual and potential provision for WRL in subjects, and progress has been made in including a WRL focus in schemes of work. For example, pupils studying French and German write about their work experience as part of their written coursework. However, it is too early to judge the impact of WRL on achievement in subjects. During the inspection the Schools Industry Liaison Officer addressed Year 10 pupils about a forthcoming full day devoted to WRL, including business simulations and team building exercises. Some lower attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 attend the local college of further education to pursue vocational courses, for example in hairdressing and motor vehicle maintenance, and achieve very good results. Links with the local Education Business Partnership are strong, typifying the school's good links with providers in the community. The range of vocational courses offered to pupils in Years 10 and 11 is limited because parents prefer a traditional academic curriculum, but four courses are available to pupils of all attainment levels.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

#### English

Provision in English is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Achievement at the end of Year 9 is good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Assessment procedures are not consistently applied or monitored.
- Not enough use is made of information on assessment to identify potential underachievement.

#### Commentary

57. Results in National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were average. They were also average in comparison with schools in which pupils attained similar standards at the end of Year 6. The percentage of pupils who reached the expected Level 5 was slightly above average while the percentage at the higher Level 6 or above was average. Over the three years prior to 2003 standards had been above average, rising to well above average before the dip in 2003. Girls' attainment is higher than that of boys and has been so for a number of years. Provisional test results for 2004 indicate that standards have risen sharply to be well above the 2003 national average (the most recent year for which national comparative figures are available). Inspection evidence indicates that standards are above average. Standards on entry in Year 7 are broadly average. Pupils of all backgrounds achieve well to reach above average standards by the end of Year 9. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well.
58. In the 2003 GCSE English language examination the percentage of pupils attaining grades A\* to C was well above average, with those obtaining A\* and A grades close to average. Results in English literature were also well above average. The provisional results for 2004 indicate a considerable decline in performance, to be in line with the national average for 2003. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in Years 10 and 11 are above national expectations.
59. The quality of teaching and learning is good and a real strength of the subject. Teachers plan their lessons well to provide a good range of activities and to maintain pupils' commitment and concentration. However, in some lessons different tasks to meet the needs of pupils across the attainment range are not provided. As a result some pupils find the work is too difficult, while others find it too easy. Teachers place strong emphasis on the key concept of understanding the purpose of and intended audience for their writing. They make good use of discussion and questioning to challenge pupils to extend their learning and pupils respond well by thinking hard and listening to the ideas of others. The department's recently introduced assessment policy is not being implemented consistently. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but the quality of marking is inconsistent. The best offers clear advice on areas for improvement, but too much of the marking offers only brief comments and little guidance for pupils. Not enough use is being made of assessment information to set targets and monitor pupils' progress.
60. The leadership of the department is satisfactory but management is unsatisfactory. After the drop in the 2003 National Curriculum test results, action was taken to raise attainment and this led to the rise in performance in 2004. Through effective teamwork, schemes of work have been revised and are being introduced in Years 7 to 9. However, there is no clear strategy for monitoring teaching and learning or for monitoring the implementation of school and department policies. As a result potential underachievement has not been identified at an early enough stage to offer additional support. This contributed to the dip in performance in the 2004 GCSE examinations. Not enough progress has been

made since the last inspection. The use of assessment information to guide planning was identified as a weakness at that time and this weakness remains.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

61. The standard of literacy in other subjects of the curriculum is good. There are good opportunities for discussion in most subjects and pupils speak clearly and make good use of specialist vocabulary. In geography, for example, pupils display good discussion and presentation skills, write confidently in a range of styles and use technical language with confidence. In most subjects teachers promote literacy in their work as well as subject knowledge. History provides many good opportunities for varied writing, for extending pupils' reading skills and for regular group discussion. Pupils use subject specialised and technical vocabulary accurately. For example, in a Year 7 science lesson pupils made good use of scientific terms and concepts in a discussion of the nature of scientific theory and evidence.

### **Modern foreign languages**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results in 2003 were above average in both French and German and improved in 2004.
- Pupils achieve well throughout Years 7 to 11 in response to good teaching.
- Very good leadership and management underpin a strong commitment from a large team of teachers.
- An excellent range of extra-curricular activities enriches learning.
- The use of assessment information to inform pupils of their progress and to set individual targets is a weakness that the department is working to rectify.

### **Commentary**

62. Teachers' assessments in 2003 indicated that standards were above expectations by the end of Year 9. There was further improvement in 2004. Girls obtain better results than boys and the difference is greater than that observed nationally. GCSE results at grades A\* to C were above average in French and German in 2003. Results improved in 2004, largely because boys' performance improved, especially in German, although girls continue to do better than boys. In view of the very large entry, these results are very commendable and indicate good achievement by average and lower attaining pupils. However, the number gaining the highest grades, A\* and A, was below average.
63. Inspection evidence confirms that standards are above average in both French and German by the end of Year 9. Girls continue to do better than boys. A strong focus on structure enables higher attaining pupils to write extensive descriptions and accounts, with tense variation. Other pupils, including those with special educational needs, convey information more briefly, both orally and in writing, but usually communicate acceptably. The vast majority of pupils achieve well. By the end of Year 11 the standards of higher attaining pupils are well above average in writing, and standards overall are above average. All groups of pupils continue to achieve well. The structure of coursework enables all pupils to write about their ideal school, and to give accounts of their work experience and past holidays. Higher attainers are creative in their approach to these topics and write very accurately. Comprehension skills are at least satisfactorily developed, because most pupils recall vocabulary readily and recognise tenses and opinions. During the inspection there was little evidence of the ability to converse freely, because of the sort of work being done. Pupils answered briefly, but their pronunciation was good.
64. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In some lessons it is very good or excellent, although there was one unsatisfactory lesson. Nearly all teachers offer both French and German, and use their very good subject knowledge to conduct lessons in the foreign language. This sets high expectations, as well as providing good models for imitation and improving listening skills. The best lessons feature rapid activities covering different skills, which engage pupils productively. Most pupils respond well. Attitudes and behaviour are good because they enjoy their work. In a minority of lessons, because not

enough account is taken of the range of attainment, some pupils lose concentration and this slows progress. Visual resources are well used to support learning, and the increased use of ICT has a beneficial effect both on language acquisition and the enjoyment of the subject. Marking is constructive, with comments added to help future learning. Homework complements classwork well, although it is not always set as planned.

65. An experienced head of department provides very good leadership and management for a largely youthful team of teachers. She has been particularly successful in implementing consistent applications of policies across the two languages to ensure similar outcomes. Monitoring procedures are thorough, with classroom observations and meetings occurring more frequently than required. New initiatives, such as the National Strategy for Key Stage 3, have been implemented and are improving learning. Analysis of outcomes leads to changes in provision, for example an emphasis on task types to improve boys' performance at GCSE, which has been successful. However, the use of assessment data to inform and motivate pupils, and to set them targets, is weak. This is a priority in the current development plan, and work has begun to rectify the weakness. An excellent range of enrichment activities increases pupils' enjoyment of their learning. These include regular residential visits to both France and Germany, developing e-mail links, a language club and booster classes. Teachers do their utmost to cope with the school timetable which causes 27 classes to have two or more teachers. Teachers strive hard to ensure continuity in learning in this unsatisfactory situation. The rise in standards and the increase in good or better teaching contribute to the judgement that there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in Years 7 to 9 are improving significantly.
- Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 9 is good.
- Teaching and learning are improving because of the successful implementation of the National Strategy for mathematics.
- Assessment information is not used effectively enough to monitor pupils' progress and raise achievement.
- The performance of the department is not monitored with enough rigour.

### **Commentary**

66. The end of Year 9 National Curriculum test results in 2003 were average when compared with all schools but below average when compared to schools in which pupils attained similar standard at the end of Year 6. The 2004 results when compared with those for 2003 show a significant improvement and represent good achievement.
67. The 2003 GCSE examination results were close to the national average but below average when compared with schools in which pupils achieved similar standards at the end of Year 9. The performance by boys and girls was very similar. The unconfirmed results in 2004 fell below those for 2003. The 2004 results represent a significant amount of underachievement.

One of the main contributory factors to this was that pupils' progress was not monitored closely enough to identify potential underachievement so that additional support could be provided. This issue is now being tackled.

68. Inspection evidence shows standards in Year 9 are above national expectations. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are improving because of the impact of the National Strategy for mathematics. The department is effectively implementing the strategy and making determined efforts to ensure that all groups of pupils reach the national standard by the end of Year 9. Standards in Year 11 are in line with expectations. The rate of progress being made by pupils in some classes in Years 10 and 11 has increased as a result

of a number of innovations, such as single gender teaching groups. This is helping pupils in Year 10, for example, to make particularly rapid progress in their understanding of algebraic expressions. As a result, standards in Year 10 are above those in Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs are provided with good support and their achievement is similar to that of their peers.

69. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, with examples of very good teaching seen in all years. Where teaching is very good it is because teachers manage pupil behaviour very well, have high expectations and time is used productively. The main strengths of teaching are teachers' very good subject knowledge and experience of test and examination requirements. The best lessons feature good planning with clear objectives and energetic teaching that engages pupils in learning. The majority of lessons start with an introductory activity that consolidates and extends pupils understanding of basic mathematical concepts. Most lessons end with a review that enables the teacher to assess what pupils have learnt, however this practice is not consistent across the subject. The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and does not always provide pupils with advice on how to improve. Pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9 is monitored through regular testing but assessments in relation to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades are not sufficiently rigorous to identify potential underachievement, as is evident by the below average results at GCSE in 2004. Teachers make effective use of the recently installed interactive white board and data projectors to support learning.
70. Leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory. The head of department provides good support to teachers and is committed to raising standards. His wide experience is used effectively to support newly qualified teachers and those new to the school. However, although test and examination results are analysed, there is little monitoring of the department's performance as a whole; in particular the consistency with which the ideas of the National Strategy are being implemented. Because of this the department is not in a position to evaluate its own progress and to set appropriate targets for improvement. The department makes good provision for gifted and talented pupils. The introduction of early GCSE examination entry, for example, is acting as an excellent motivator for these pupils. There are also opportunities for enrichment through entry to the UK maths challenge and high achieving pupils in Years 7 to 9 attend events organised through the school cluster. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

71. Standards of numeracy are average. The work done in mathematics gives pupils confidence to apply their knowledge in other subjects. Pupils have a good command of number facts and are able to tackle numerical calculations in different situations. There is, for example, good practice in art through the use of shape and form. In design and technology pupils work to scale, measure and weigh accurately. They use co-ordinates correctly and use good graphing techniques in geography and good use is made of mathematical skills in the teaching of ICT.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Science College status has enthused staff and pupils to aim for higher standards.
- Very good leadership is encouraging higher standards of teaching and learning.
- Good assessment procedures enable teachers and pupils to set meaningful targets.
- Pupils' use of ICT in science has been limited but this is improving with the new equipment available in the department.
- Good technical support sustains teaching and learning.

### Commentary

72. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are broadly average. In the 2003 end of Year 9 National Curriculum tests, results were well above average. The 2004 results showed a further improvement particularly in the number of pupils achieving Level 5 and above. The 2003 GCSE results in double science for grades A\* to C were below the national average. However, a significant proportion of pupils were entered for the three separate sciences and almost all candidates achieved A\* to C grades. Hence the proportion of pupils gaining A\* to C grades in science is above the national average. The 2004 GCSE results showed a further improvement in the A\* to C grades. A small number of pupils who were entered for the Science Plus certificate were also entered for the GCSE single award science. Most of these pupils obtained pass grades. Results in GCSE examinations in science were above those in mathematics. There were no significant differences in the results obtained by boys and girls at the end of Years 9 or 11.
73. Inspection evidence shows standards are above national expectations at the end of Year 9. Most pupils show a sound knowledge of the topics covered and good practical skills. At the end of Year 11 standards are also above expectations. Many pupils are able to explain and discuss appropriate scientific concepts. Taking standards on entry into account achievement at the end of Years 9 and 11 is good. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is consistent with that of their peers.
74. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, with much that is very good. Teachers use their subject expertise well. Most lessons have a good pace, are well planned and pupils are provided with a range of challenging activities. This was seen, for example, in a Year 9 lesson investigating different types of joints. Pupils made rapid gains in their understanding of how joints work through a range of learning activities involving X-ray photographs, human skeleton and animal joints. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they are provided with supportive teaching. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, pupils with special educational needs showed a good understanding of the varying sensitivity of different parts of the skin because the learning activities were well matched to their needs. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is improving and extension activities for these pupils are built into many lesson plans. A range of enrichment activities, including a science club, enhances provision. Relationships are good and this contributes to the good learning atmosphere seen in most lessons. Homework is set regularly. The department has responded positively to the National Strategy for pupils' learning in Years 7 to 9 and this has been developed to provide a standardised approach to lesson planning across the department.
75. Very good leadership and management are seen in the regular review and monitoring of the work of the department. The department makes detailed analyses of pupils' progress and this information is used effectively to set targets and to monitor the progress of individuals and groups. There is a good supportive team of teachers and technical support is of a high standard. The new science block with its excellent resources provides a stimulus to all who teach and learn in this exciting environment. The older laboratories are gradually being improved and the recent increase in ICT equipment is well used. Liaison with local primary schools is very good.

76. The subject has made good progress since the last inspection. The Science College has been established, the leadership and management have improved and assessment is used more effectively. The department has good potential for further improvement.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average.
- There has been a very significant improvement in ICT resources; the number of computers is above average for a school of this size.
- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in the GNVQ course in Year 10.
- The first GNVQ results in 2004 were well below average.
- Not enough time is allocated for the management of the increased range of ICT courses, and for co-ordinating the use of ICT across the curriculum.

### Commentary

77. Attainment on entry is generally in line with national expectations. Inspection evidence indicates that standards at the end of Year 9 are above expectations. This represents good progress and achievement through Years 7 to 9. In Year 7 pupils are able to construct good on screen presentations and by Year 9 are very competent in spreadsheet work. This is a result of very good teaching and learning, combined with greatly improved resources and the effective implementation of the National Strategy for ICT. Teachers make very good use of interactive whiteboards where they are available. Work is assessed appropriately against National Curriculum criteria and pupils receive good advice on how to improve.
78. The school entered candidates for the GNVQ ICT examination for the first time in 2004. The results were well below the 2003 national average. Inspection evidence indicates that standards are improving in Years 10 and 11, but are more variable than they are in the earlier years. The department has carefully evaluated the performance of the first group of candidates to take the GNVQ examination and have restructured teaching in the light of this evaluation. Because of this the present examination groups are making very good progress and standards are above expectations. Teaching and learning on the course is effectively supported by access to Internet based resources. Some pupils follow an ICT key skills course in Year 11 and although overall standards are below expectations achievement is generally good when standards on entry are taken into account. Less than half of the pupils in Years 10 and 11 take externally assessed courses. ICT provision for the remainder is through the application and development of their ICT in other subjects. However, this provision is not monitored and there is a lack of consistency in the assessment of standards.
79. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The work of a large team of teachers in Years 7 to 9 is appropriately co-ordinated and supported by the head of department. There has been a significant expansion of ICT equipment recently, including the acquisition of a number of interactive whiteboards. These resources are being used effectively and having a positive impact on standards. The head of the ICT department is also responsible for the co-ordination of ICT. In addition he has a significant A-level teaching commitment in another subject. This limits the time available to monitor cross-curricular provision and to develop appropriate assessment procedures for Years 10 and 11. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory and there is good potential for further improvement.

## **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

80. There has been a significant increase in ICT resources and the current number of computers for use by pupils is above average for a school of this size. These resources are used effectively and pupils show a satisfactory level of competence in the way in which they use ICT to support their work in other subjects. Good use is made of ICT in science, music, modern foreign languages, and in art in Years 10 and 11, but not enough use is made of computers in English and design and technology. The cross-curricular use of ICT has yet to be audited and assessment arrangements are not in place. The school is aware of these weaknesses and steps are being taken to tackle them.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well because teaching is good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- There are not enough independent learning opportunities for higher attaining pupils.

#### **Commentary**

81. Teachers' assessments indicate that the proportion of pupils attaining the expected Level 5 or above at the end of Year 9 is above average, with girls well above and boys average. Work seen during the inspection confirms that standards are above average. This represents good achievement for pupils entering the school with average levels of attainment. The department recruits well at the end of Year 9 and GCSE entries are high. In 2003 the proportion of pupils obtaining A\* to C grades was a little above average, with boys' results slightly better than girls. In 2004 a lower attaining intake did less well, with girls' results in line with the 2003 average and boys below. In both years pupils have exceeded their predictions and have done better in geography than in most other subjects. This represents good achievement.
82. In Years 7 to 9 pupils develop basic mapping skills and much of the work is enhanced by the effective use of ICT. This is seen in many very good classroom displays. Writing skills develop well and project work on a wide range of topics such as the Torrey Canyon disaster and the geographic location of Tokyo widen pupils' knowledge of places and themes. Pupils' literacy skills are enhanced as they develop a good technical vocabulary.
83. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. Lessons are carefully planned and a range of techniques is used to interest and challenge pupils. As a result pupils are fully engaged and display very positive attitudes. Pupils work well co-operatively and are provided with opportunities to engage in independent work. However, more of these opportunities need to be provided in order to further challenge and extend higher attainers. All pupils work equally well in lessons and those with special needs benefit from using appropriate learning materials and well planned teacher support. Pupils' knowledge of geographical processes and patterns is greatly improved by the good use of fieldwork, including residential courses. In Years 10 and 11 enquiry skills improve and coursework shows that pupils are able to specify clear objectives, gather and analyse data and reach accurate conclusions. Work is well presented in all years. Pupils' work is well marked, regularly assessed and their progress monitored.
84. Leadership and management are very good. Clear vision and direction enable an effective team of teachers to develop new ideas and seek to further raise standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and the team has the capacity to improve further.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good classroom relationships lead to good learning and progress in many lessons.
- Good and often better teaching contributes to well above average GCSE results.
- Procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of aspects of the department's work are too informal.
- Very good leadership underpins the subject's performance.
- There are weaknesses in the assessment procedures.

### Commentary

85. In the 2003 GCSE examinations three-quarters of candidates gained A\* to C grades which was well above the national average; girls did better than boys but the difference was about the same as that nationally. The 2004 results were very close to those obtained in 2003, but boys did significantly better than girls. Teacher assessments for Year 9 pupils in the same year showed that attainment was above average.
86. Pupils enter the school with average attainment and achieve well to reach standards above expectations at the end of Year 9. Higher-attaining pupils complete some good quality extended writing and all undertake detailed historical enquiries into topics such as life in the trenches in World War I. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well.
87. At GCSE level there are clear strengths in extended writing and the interpretation of sources, although pupils are unlikely to refer to provenance of a source in commenting on its usefulness or reliability. Pupils achieve very highly because nearly all behave well and respond positively to each other, their teachers and the opportunities offered to them. Pupils in lower sets in Year 11 sometimes fall below these standards and their work contains too many literacy errors. Many of these errors are not corrected by teachers.
88. The overall quality of teaching was good, although lessons seen ranged from excellent to unsatisfactory. Characteristics of the best lessons included the use of teachers' very good subject knowledge, high expectations and effective questioning to explore, extend and refine pupils' knowledge and understanding. Less progress was made in lessons where pupils were not engaged because of weaknesses in classroom management or learning activities were not well matched to their attainment levels. Marking is inconsistent. While the marking of some work is clear and helpful, the style of marking varies between different teachers so pupils are not always given a clear indication of how their work can be improved.
89. The head of department provides very good leadership to a strong team of specialist teachers who work very closely together. Teachers work well together and have a good mix of skills and experience. They strive hard to overcome the difficulties caused by a lack of specialist classrooms. Management of the subject is satisfactory. There is a need for more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department in order to ensure that strengths are identified and shared and weaknesses tackled. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and the subject has good potential for further improvement.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Not enough curriculum time is allocated to the subject in Year 10. This is having an adverse impact on standards.
- Teaching is good and contributes well to pupils' achievement.
- The contribution made by the subject to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good.
- Not enough use is made of assessment information to guide planning.

### Commentary

90. Standards in Year 10 are adversely affected because the subject does not receive enough time to fully cover the Locally Agreed Syllabus. However, pupils achieve well in the opportunities that are provided within the available time.
91. Results in the GCSE full course examination were well below average in 2003. In 2004, the results improved, although they remained below average. In the GCSE short course examination, all pupils entered achieved grades in the A\* to C range. This was a very good performance.
92. Inspection evidence shows that at the end of Year 9, standards are consistent with the expectations of the Walsall Agreed Syllabus. Given pupils' below average standards on entry to the school, this represents good achievement. Pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of different faiths and are able to link their knowledge of different religions with their everyday experiences. At the end of Year 11, standards are also in line with expectations. Pupils make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of religious concepts. However, they do not always question or explore their own attitudes in enough depth and so do not develop an understanding of how they can learn from religion and apply it in their lives. This results from the limited amount of curriculum time available in Year 10.
93. Teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. The teachers' very good use of discussion and questioning enables pupils to express their opinions and form clear judgments about religious and moral issues. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good, because they are provided with good support and work that matches their needs. The use of key words and subject specific language enable pupils to improve their speaking and listening skills. Pupils make good progress as a result of the teachers' very good knowledge of the subject and an awareness of individual pupil needs. However, not enough use is made of assessment information to support pupils' progress. The assessment procedures provide a sound basis for assessing what pupils know and understand. However, the information is not used to set targets against which pupils' progress can be monitored so that underachievement can be identified at an early stage. This weakness has been identified and plans are in place to tackle this.
94. The school's arrangements for the leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The acting head of subject has been in post for three weeks. She approaches the task with enthusiasm and commitment and is well supported by a dedicated team of teachers. One of the tasks that need to be tackled in order to raise achievement is to implement more rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning in the subject. Progress since the last inspection is unsatisfactory, because of the weakness in provision in Year 10. However, the subject has good potential for future improvement.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good GCSE results have raised the profile of the subject.
- Good teaching is promoting good progress and classes are well managed.
- Module booklets provide pupils with good learning guides.
- Not enough use is made of ICT to enhance pupils' designs.
- There are weaknesses in procedures for monitoring and evaluating work in the department.

#### Commentary

95. Teachers' assessments show that standards at the end of Year 9 were below the national average in 2003, but above the 2003 national average in 2004. Inspection evidence confirms that standards are above national expectations at the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement because pupils have few design skills on entry in Year 7. GCSE examination results in 2003 were above average for both boys and girls, but the boys performed less well than in their other subjects. The results represent good achievement for girls and satisfactory achievement for boys. The 2004 results rose to be well above the 2003 national average. High examination entry levels, with virtually all pupils gaining grades in the A\* to C range, indicate that pupils are provided with equal opportunities to achieve success. Because learning activities are well matched to pupils' attainment levels, pupils of all groups, including those with special education needs, achieve equally well.
96. Difficulties in staffing have been tackled by reducing the amount of curriculum time allocated to the subject. As a result, the design and technology programme is restricted in Years 7 to 9. This has had an adverse effect in control and textiles and pupils' knowledge and understanding is below expectations in these areas. Very effective module booklets help to structure pupils' learning and provide a clear guide to the knowledge and skills to be acquired.
97. In Years 10 and 11, standards in resistant materials and industrial manufacturing are below expectations because, although pupils' making skills are good, their designing is hampered by weaknesses in their organisation, meeting deadlines and in the use of ICT to enhance the quality of their work. A contributory factor here is the workshops, which are out of date and not well suited to designing activities. Food technology continues to be strong, along with graphics. The introduction of a health and social care course has attracted boys and girls. Pupils are well motivated and keen to take responsibility for their own learning.
98. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good across all years. Lessons are well planned and effective demonstrations give pupils a clear guide to the learning activities. As a result, pupils handle tools, materials and equipment safely. The best lessons have good pace and challenging activities. These activities fully engage pupils and stimulate creative thinking. In lessons where teaching is less successful pupils are not engaged and their attention wanders. Classroom management is generally good and pupils are kept on task in most lessons.
99. The recently appointed acting head of technology is providing good subject leadership. The teaching team form an effective working group, with good technical support. Management is satisfactory. While work has been done to ensure a common understanding of National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9, there are no monitoring procedures to ensure that these levels are applied consistently in the assessment of pupils' work. Similarly, rigorous procedures for monitoring the work of the department, including risk assessments, have yet to be introduced. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection and the potential for improvement is good.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

100. Drama and media studies were lightly sampled during the inspection. **Drama** is taught in Years 7 to 9 and offered as an option in Years 10 and 11. Standards in the GCSE examination in 2003 were close to the national average. They rose slightly in 2004 but remained very close to the average for 2003, the most recent year for which comparative information is available. In two lessons seen in Years 10 and 11, attainment was below national expectations because pupils' basic performance skills were not well enough developed so that they lacked confidence in their ability to command the attention of the audience. The practical work of current Year 11 pupils is below average. They find it difficult to create and sustain a role because assessment in lessons does not help them to see how to improve their work. Drama is taught by English teachers who have no training in teaching drama and who have not received any subsequent training to enable them to carry out this additional role. **Media studies** is being offered at GCSE level for the first time this year. In the lesson observed pupils made very good gains in their understanding of the rules governing broadcasting to children because of focused and energetic teaching.

### Art and Design

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results were above average in 2003 and improved in 2004.
- Three-dimensional work is strong.
- Though the overall quality of teaching is good, it is inconsistent ranging from excellent to unsatisfactory. Well-structured teaching enables pupils to achieve well.
- Not enough use is made of sketchbooks.

#### Commentary

101. GCSE results were above average in 2003 and improved in 2004. In 2003 girls' performance was above the national average for girls, boys' was in line with the national average for boys. In 2004 boys' results improved to come into line with girls'.
102. In Year 7 to 9 standards are in line with national expectations and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils have well-developed practical skills; though their knowledge and understanding of artists' work is not always secure. Pupils' investigative skills and their use of sketchbooks are comparatively weak. Standards, overall, are above expectations and achievement is good in Year 11, but they are inconsistent from class to class. Where standards are above expectations, pupils show a good command of the visual elements, such as tone and colour and use media well. Where standards are below expectations, pupils are too dependent on photographic sources or use mainly invented images and a limited range of media. Some pupils write perceptively about art but some copy texts indiscriminately. Pupils use their numeracy skills effectively for such tasks as measuring and estimating. Year 10 and 11 pupils use ICT for research but pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not use it enough. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily because of the individual attention teaching provides. Gifted and talented pupils are encouraged to undertake more challenging work and achieve well, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In Year 11 some boys achieve much better than boys nationally because teachers provide them with the skills they need to explore subject matter that interests them.
103. Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. However, the quality of teaching is widely inconsistent ranging from excellent to unsatisfactory and this leads to an uneven quality of learning. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally satisfactory and sometimes good in Years 10 and 11. The best lessons are well structured, make good use of resources, provide challenging content and begin with attention-focusing activities. A rapid pace maintains pupils' interest and reviews at the end of lessons enable pupils to reflect thoughtfully on their learning. In a Year 10 lesson pupils were asked to make a viewfinder, place an object in their hand, record the main shape and details and redraw

the image on another piece of paper. Pupils' concentration was excellent, and all made rapid gains in their observational drawing skills. Unsatisfactory lessons do not include activities that help to develop pupils' skills. As a result they do not feel that they are making any progress and lose interest.

104. Though leadership is good, it has the potential to be better if teaching and learning were more effectively monitored and the features of good practice shared systematically. The department is well organised and effectively managed. The wide range of expertise enables a broad curriculum to be provided. Assessment arrangements are good and data analysis is beginning to be used effectively; it revealed, for example, the disparity between boys' and girls' performance in the 2003 GCSE results and led to more effective teaching and learning strategies being put in place. Good use is made of visits to art galleries and museums and useful initiatives have been undertaken with partner primary schools. Very good use is made of artists in residence.
105. Overall progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The department has maintained its high standards. Although an overall good quality of teaching has been maintained, inconsistency is now apparent. Pupils' dependence on secondary source material remains evident and the department still does not encourage pupils to use sketchbooks enough. The print room is still too small for the number of pupils taught.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The vision and determination of the head of department to provide pupils with a broad based enjoyable music education.
- Provision for the more musically talented is excellent.
- All teachers are united in their aim to help pupils achieve the highest standards possible.
- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils help to promote excellent learning.
- The department has outgrown its present accommodation and is in need of additional resources.

### **Commentary**

106. The 2003 teachers' assessments show that by the end of Year 9, attainment was above average. The proportion of pupils attaining A\* to C grades in the GCSE examination was well above average. In 2004 attainment at the end of Year 9 was slightly higher than the previous year and GCSE results were still well above the 2003 national average. In comparison with other subjects, these candidates achieved their highest average point score in music. Their results also represent very good achievement.
107. Inspection evidence shows that standards in Year 9 are above expectations. As pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7 is, overall, below average, standards at the end of Year 9 represent very good achievement. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are well above average. Each year the school offers up to twenty places for music scholars, who study music as separate classes, enter for public examinations early and achieve high results. The GCSE music option is also available for non-music scholars.
108. Teaching and learning are very good. Many of the lessons observed were excellent. The majority of musically able pupils are suitably stretched in the scholarship class and in the top set of every year. All pupils enjoy the practical nature of lessons because tasks are well suited to their attainment levels. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and no difference was noted between the progress of boys and girls. Pupils' learning is also enhanced by teachers' good lesson planning, clear explanations and the appropriate allocation of time for the completion of tasks. Pupil demonstrations are used effectively to inspire others in the class. Very good relationships exist between pupils and staff. Further provision for the musically able is provided by two annual residential courses, the high standard of instrumental lessons, and many other performing opportunities.

109. Leadership of the subject is excellent. The present head of department is an excellent role model to staff and pupils alike. Through his vision the department has developed into one of excellence where invaluable musical experiences abound. Management is very good. Class teachers and instrumental staff are united in their aim to help pupils achieve the highest standards possible.
110. The department is a strength of the school. Since the last inspection the issues raised in the last report have been tackled vigorously. As a result improvement has been very good. However the department has outgrown the present accommodation. Because there are more and larger teaching groups in Years 7 to 9 some lessons have to be taught outside the music rooms. This has an adverse effect on teaching and learning. In addition the resources are inadequate for the number of pupils.

### **Physical education**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The majority of pupils reach better than expected standards and achieve well.
- The quality of teaching and learning is generally good.
- Not enough use is made of assessment information for target setting and curriculum planning.
- A very good range of extra-curricular activities is provided and participation is high.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning in physical education and behave well.
- Not enough support is provided for lower attaining pupils in examination theory lessons.

### **Commentary**

111. GCSE examination results in 2003 were well above average and most pupils achieved well in relation to their starting points at the beginning of Year 10. An impressive proportion of pupils obtained the highest A\* and A grades. Results fell in 2004 but an analysis indicates that overall achievement is still good, although in both years it was only satisfactory in relation to some of the lower attaining pupils.
112. Standards seen in Year 9 are above national expectations. Pupils generally achieve well in relation to their average starting points in Year 7. This is largely due to good teaching and the fact that from the outset, they are taught in groups of similar ability. Good learning habits are quickly established. In gymnastics and swimming, for example, teachers capitalise on the pupils' very positive attitudes and so rapid progress is made. As a result, most pupils reach better than expected standards in most activities by the end of Year 9. In major games such as netball, higher attainers reach standards more typically expected of older pupils. Knowledge and understanding of the effects of exercise on the body are sound and pupils confidently lead others in safe preparation for strenuous physical activity.
113. Standards seen in compulsory physical education lessons in Year 11 are above expectations, particularly in major games. In some optional activities, for example badminton, standards vary between groups and are dependent on the extent to which the teaching stretches pupils. In GCSE examination classes, standards in practical activities are well above expectations. In theory lessons they vary more. An analysis of pupils' written work indicates that some lower attaining pupils fail to complete tasks and need more support for their learning. However, throughout the school, the progress of pupils with special education needs is similar to that of their peers because teachers adapt the work well for them. A significant proportion of pupils take part in the very good programme of extra-curricular sport. This makes a good contribution to the overall standards reached in physical education. There is a good measure of representation of both boys and girls at local, area and sometimes national level.
114. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Most lessons provide both interest and challenge, and very good relationships help ensure pupils' full participation in the learning. Explanations and demonstrations are clear and activities ensure that pupils have good opportunities to talk to each other

about how to improve their work. Subject knowledge is used effectively in analysing performance and questioning pupils. Learning objectives are shared with pupils although the extent to which they are met is not always thoroughly evaluated at the end of the lesson. Assessment procedures are good, with the promising recent innovation of involving pupils more closely in the process. However, examination results and other assessment information are not analysed well enough to be used for target setting and improvement planning.

115. The subject is well led and management is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, examination results have remained at the same level but improvement in other respects has been good. Developing links with other local schools are having a positive impact on the quality of provision. The potential for further improvement is good.

### **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

116. The school places considerable emphasis on this area of pupils' personal development, which is reflected in pupils' positive attitudes, good behaviour and the good relationships that permeate the whole school. All pupils are treated fairly and have full access to all aspects of the curriculum. Grouping arrangements take account of pupils' individual needs and capabilities. The curriculum and other aspects of school life prepare pupils well for the next stage of learning and their life beyond school. The **PSHE** programme effectively supports pupils' personal and social development. Topics such as sex and drugs education are appropriately covered and the knowledge that pupils gain ensures that they are well informed on these matters. The teaching team is beginning to develop good expertise. They are secure in their knowledge and approach topics with confidence. They use a range of skills to encourage pupils to reflect upon issues as well as learning about them. This approach enables pupils to feel confident in expressing their own views in an atmosphere of trust. As a result pupils feel secure in discussing personal issues. The good contribution that the subject makes to the moral and social development of pupils results from this enabling approach. Curriculum leadership is very good. The subject co-ordinator approaches the work with commitment, a clear vision and sense of purpose and direction. She has been successful in developing a strong team approach, and is very well supported by other teachers.
117. The school is committed to the provision of **citizenship** education and sees it as an essential element of pupils' personal development. This is seen in the many opportunities that are provided for pupils to develop an understanding of responsible citizenship and the democratic process through, for example, elections to the house and school councils. It is intended that the formal teaching of citizenship should be as a cross-curricular theme across all subjects. An audit has been carried out to ensure that all of the elements of the citizenship curriculum can be covered in this way. However, although the teaching of citizenship is planned in this way there are no monitoring procedures to ensure that the plan is implemented. No lessons in which citizenship education was being taught through a subject were observed during the inspection and so it is not possible to comment on the quality teaching and learning. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. There are no procedures for assessing and reporting pupils' progress in the subject.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003 (the latest date for which national comparative data are available).

### *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
Art and design	6	83	80	17	24	32	30
Biology	5	100	65	0	11	20	21
Business studies	1	0	76	0	16	0	26
Chemistry	3	67	77	0	14	20	24
Classical studies	3	100	87	33	34	37	35
Economics	1	0	74	0	20	0	26
English/English language	2	100	83	0	18	30	29
English literature	9	100	86	0	19	30	30
French	4	100	78	25	19	35	26
Design and technology	7	100	75	14	15	36	25
General studies	1	100	74	0	18	30	26
Geography	6	50	74	33	20	22	27
German	3	67	82	0	19	23	29
History	9	67	81	0	20	18	29
Mathematics	11	36	62	18	17	15	22
Media studies	9	100	86	67	29	48	32
Music	2	100	87	50	21	45	31
Other social studies	32	94	70	19	17	34	24

### *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
Art and design	11	100	99	36	50	89	88
Biology	19	100	96	37	39	82	79
Business studies	15	100	99	28	39	80	80
Chemistry	17	100	98	47	49	88	85
Classical studies	13	100	100	31	56	74	91
Economics	6	100	99	83	52	107	88
English/English language	15	100	99	27	36	73	81
English literature	35	100	100	43	47	84	87

French	8	100	99	25	52	73	88
Design and technology	8	100	98	25	35	75	78
Geography	12	100	99	50	45	88	84
German	3	100	98	67	48	87	85
History	12	100	99	42	45	90	85
Mathematics	11	100	97	55	56	89	89
Media studies	27	100	99	33	38	83	83
Music	3	100	99	33	39	87	81
Other social studies	34	100	97	35	43	78	82
Physics	9	100	97	33	45	89	82
Religious studies	6	100	99	67	47	93	86
Sports/PE studies	5	100	98	20	31	76	75
VCE business	16	88	65	13	15	61	61

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

118. Courses in English literature and English language and literature were inspected in detail and German was sampled. Results in **German** at A-level in 2003 represented satisfactory achievement. In the lesson observed, students in Year 13 made good progress in oral and comprehension work. They worked enthusiastically in response to good teaching.

### English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- There is a flexible policy for entry to the courses and lower attaining students achieve well.
- Insufficient monitoring of assessment information means that under achievement is not identified.
- There is no system of additional monitoring or support for lower attaining students.

### Commentary

119. In 2003 A-level results in English literature were average. The percentage of pupils with Grades A or B was close to what is seen nationally and all students attained a pass grade. The results for the English language and literature course were below the national average but, although fewer students than nationally were awarded Grade A or B, all students attained a pass. The provisional results for 2004 indicate that the average point score for English literature fell significantly while for English language and literature it rose slightly.

120. A full range of evidence seen during the course of the inspection indicates that standards are currently in line with what is seen nationally. This represents satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection when standards were below average.

121. Achievement in Years 12 and 13 is satisfactory. The department operates an admirably flexible entry policy designed to give as many students as possible the opportunity to study English at this higher level. This means that a considerable proportion of students start the courses with previous attainment which does not form a firm basis on which to meet the considerable demands of the subject at A-level.

These students achieve well to obtain an A-level pass. However, the achievement of students who start the course with higher grades at GCSE is only satisfactory, with too few gaining grade A or B.

122. Students make good progress in understanding and using the contextual background of their texts to help their analysis and interpretation of them. They develop confident textual knowledge, which enables them to select effective references to justify their opinions. Students develop well the skills of planning and structuring their written assignments in order to present a coherent argument. Progress is slower and less secure, especially among the lower attaining students, in making the transition to forming a more analytical and evaluative response to literature.
123. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers do a great deal to ensure that students' individual needs are met. They provide a wide range of activities and groupings to make texts accessible to a wide range of students. They make good use of questioning and discussion to make students think hard and reflect on their answers. Because students know that both teachers and fellow students will listen to their ideas with interest and respect, they have the confidence to hypothesise and air their uncertainties. Many lessons are planned to give opportunities for the teacher to offer additional support to individuals or small groups and in this way they are able to meet students' needs across a wide attainment range. When teachers spend too long on whole class teaching, lessons lose their impact and pace and less progress is made. The quality of marking is good since it gives students detailed, clearly focused advice on what they need to do to improve.
124. The leadership of English in the sixth form is satisfactory, while the management is unsatisfactory. It is the policy of the department to have a flexible response to students who wish to study the subject but whose previous attainment would not necessarily give them a sound basis for further progress. Students feel well supported by the department. There are no schemes of work and teachers, especially those with less experience, lack the guidance and support that these offer. There is no expectation of or procedure for the structured, regular monitoring of students' progress during and at the end of the courses and this is left to the discretion of individual teachers. Potential under-achievement is not identified. Having admitted to the course a number of students who might be expected to have some difficulty in meeting its demands, there is no system for regularly monitoring their continued suitability or to offer additional support.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

125. The standard of literacy in other subjects is good. A particular strength in a number of subjects is the quality of discussion, for example in music where it does much to enhance students' progress. The quality of writing is also good. Students use a variety of different writing styles for a range of purposes, for example in physics where students both compile good notes and also have a clear style in their more extended writing. In physical education students use their writing skills well to compile complex and informative personal profiles. However, in history the lack of attention to the correction of spelling and grammar errors means that students continue to make the same basic mistakes.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results at A-level were slightly above average in 2003 with all students gaining a pass grade.
- Teachers are well qualified and teaching is good.
- Students have very good attitudes and commitment to learning.
- The variety of students' learning approaches is too narrow and the contexts through which mathematics is taught are limited.

## Commentary

126. The A-level results in 2003 were slightly above average with all candidates gaining at least a pass grade. However, results in 2004 fell. The average point score was lower and the percentage gaining grades A or B was significantly lower than in 2003. This represents satisfactory achievement and was in line with that predicted by candidates' performance in GCSE examinations.
127. Inspection evidence confirms that students' attainment is as expected at this stage of the course in both Year 12 and Year 13. Because students enter Year 12 with a sound base of mathematical knowledge and understanding gained at GCSE they quickly bridge the gap to the AS course. In a very good Year 12 lesson, students extended their understanding of gradients of curves through the creation of a limit in order to find a gradient at a particular point. Similarly in Year 13 students coped remarkably well with the concept of logarithms and manipulated these with considerable ease. Students from different cultural backgrounds are achieving similar standards to their peers.
128. The quality of teaching and learning is overall good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics is very good. Teaching is rigorous and ensures that students are taught basic principles in all three modules. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and this is transmitted to the students. The best lessons are characterised by very good relationships and collaborative learning. Students, in their turn, appreciate their teachers' commitment and the level of support they give. Together with their very good attitudes, this enables students to approach tasks with confidence, often resulting in very good achievement in lessons. Teachers have high expectation for students and set appropriate targets for them to achieve. However, there are too few occasions for students to widen their learning approaches through more open-ended tasks and independent research. Teachers do not always challenge students about the methods used and why these work. Students are informed of their progress through the regular assessment of their work and discussion in class. The mathematics component of the General Studies AS level course is taught well.
129. Leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory. Results are analysed and this informs future planning. The head of department has created a good team of experienced mathematicians who are knowledgeable about the requirements of the examinations. This is a major factor in the increasing numbers of students wishing to study the subject. The department has undertaken appropriate preparation for the new A-level courses beginning this September. Limited use is made of ICT and practical activities to support learning although supporting textbooks are new and appropriate. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

130. Students' mathematical knowledge and skills are well developed and sufficient for the needs of their chosen courses. For example in A-level physics students skilfully apply their knowledge of algebra to solve equations. In A-level business studies students use their numerical skills well to underpin research. Students studying the AS-level General Studies course make effective use of their mathematical knowledge and skills gained at GCSE.

## SCIENCE

131. The inspection focused on biology and physics, but chemistry and the AS enrichment course, science for public understanding, were also sampled. **Chemistry** results in 2003 were above average and student performance was better than predicted by their results at GCSE. In the chemistry lesson observed, students worked well and were eager to learn. Teaching was good. In the AS examination in **science for public understanding** in 2004 all students achieved at least a pass grade. In the lesson observed teaching and learning were good.

## Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and used well to provide good challenge.
- Assessment and target setting are used well to track the progress of students.
- Examination results are above average.

### Commentary

132. The GCE A-level examination results in 2003 were above those of other schools nationally and all students gained at least a grade D. A-level results, particularly higher grades, A and B, improved significantly in 2004. In each of the 2003 and the 2004 examinations, students' achievement was as at least as expected relative to their GCSE grades with some students exceeding expectations. The standards of the current Year 13 students are well above average and they are achieving very well in relation to their GCSE results. In lessons, students achieve very well as a result of the very good teaching, which demands much of them. In one lesson, for example, all students made very good improvements in their knowledge and understanding of electrical capacitance. Higher-attaining students, in particular, recalled previous work on the effects of changing the potential difference between two parallel plates and used it effectively to develop further understanding. Lower-attaining students, however, needed greater input from their teacher to reach the same level of understanding.
133. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course. Nevertheless, they are achieving well overall and are at least matching expectations relative to their GCSE results. All students are successfully moving on from GCSE work into new areas of physics. This is aided by the good conversion course that helps students adjust to the rigours of more advanced work. A few lower-attaining students, however, have greater difficulty in applying the concepts learned in GCSE to more advanced work.
134. Students learn very well. They respond to challenge, work hard and show interest in their work. They support and help each other and enter into mature discussion as part of their learning. They undertake independent work in a mature way. Written work is generally well presented and matches the confidence which students display in the classroom. Students display a high degree of numerical competency.
135. Teaching is very good. The use of very good subject knowledge coupled with good, well focused, lesson planning maintains interest and engenders learning. Students are provided with good opportunities for independent learning both within the laboratory and in homework. All students have targets, and good use is made of assessment to monitor their progress against targets, to identify underachievers and adjust teaching accordingly. Day-to-day marking is thorough and often provides good guidance for students on how to improve.
136. Leadership and management in the physics department are good. There is a commitment to improving standards and to increasing the number of students taking physics at advanced level. Apart from the quality of the physics laboratories the department is well resourced and teachers use computer technology to good effect. Improvement since the last inspection is good and the capacity to improve further is good.

## Biology

Provision in biology is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and is used well to stimulate students.
- Students work very well together and with their teachers.
- Assessment is used very well to track the progress of students relative to their targets.

### Commentary

137. The results in GCE A-level examinations in 2003 were above average, although the number of proportion of students gaining Grades A and B was below average. Results were mostly as expected when compared with students' GCSE results. Results in the 2004 examinations were much better than those for 2003, particularly at the higher grades and better than expected when compared with GCSE results. All A-level candidates in the last three years have obtained at least a pass grade.
138. Current standards are above average. Most Year 13 students are achieving at a level that is better than expected in relation to their GCSE results. In the best lessons, students make very good progress as a result of very good teaching. In a very good biology lesson, for example, students made very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of the Krebs Cycle in the process of respiration. Higher-attaining students, in particular, recall previous knowledge very well and use it effectively to develop further understanding. Written work is generally well presented and matches the confidence which students display in the classroom.
139. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course. Most are successfully moving on from GCSE work into new areas of biology. Written work is well developed and, when provided with the opportunity to do so, students make good progress in developing their skills of independent research.
140. Teaching is very good. The principal features of teaching are the use of very good subject knowledge by teachers, good, well focused planning and a range of methods to maintain interest and engender learning. Homework is set that extends class-work and often takes the form of examination questions or work involving further research. Assessment is used very well to monitor the progress of students, to identify underachievers and adjust teaching accordingly. Day-to-day marking is thorough and usually provides valuable information for students on how to improve their performance. Students' learning is very good. Most respond very well to challenge, work hard and most show interest in their work. They support and help each other and enter into mature discussion as part of their learning. Most undertake independent work maturely, can extract information and make their own notes.
141. Leadership and management in the biology department are very good. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Target setting, based upon grades predicted from students' average GCSE point score, is in place. The range of learning support materials available is good. As a result, students have good opportunities for independent research and study. Computer technology is used well as a teaching aid and as a research tool. Improvement since the last inspection is good and the capacity for further improvement is also good.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

### Information and communication technology across the curriculum

142. The use of ICT in sixth form courses is good overall and very good in a significant proportion of subjects. The overall standard of ICT capability in the sixth form is satisfactory. Students' ICT skills and knowledge are generally at least adequate for the demands of their respective courses up to A-level although a significant proportion does have good general ICT capability.
143. The compulsory sixth form key skills course is making a good contribution to learning and overall standards in post-16 courses. Teaching and learning in the key skills course is good. Students make progress with presentational skills. They develop their ability to record and analyse data using both spreadsheets and databases. Research skills and Internet use are refined to make students more efficient and effective learners. In addition to the key skills course, many subject teachers provide good support for students in relation to subject specific ICT applications.
144. ICT use is particularly prevalent and beneficial in science subjects, notably biology. It is also very good in the VCE Business course. The use of ICT is very good in music and has the potential to be better if more resources were available. The use of computer hardware and software by teachers to support teaching and learning in English and mathematics is less well developed. Students make at least satisfactory and often good use of computers for research and for presenting work in all subjects.

## HUMANITIES

145. History was inspected in detail and geography, psychology and religious studies were sampled. In **geography** A-level results in 2003 were above average. These standards were maintained in 2004 and students exceeded their predicted grades because of good teaching. In **psychology** the 2004 A-level results were well above the average result obtained in 2003. Teaching and learning in the Year 13 lesson observed were good. In **religious education** the A-level results in 2003 were above average but fell significantly in 2004, the average point score dropping from 93 to 66. Standards of current students are average. Teaching is good and enables students to develop skills of analysis and evaluation and independence in their learning and research.

### History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently high quality teaching enables many students to learn very well.
- Very good classroom relationships and attitudes make a significant contribution to achievement.
- Very good leadership is playing an important role in the subject's performance.
- Procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of aspects of the department are too informal, leading, for example, to inconsistencies in marking.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory.

### Commentary

146. Results in the A-level examinations in 2003 were above average. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades, A and B, was close to average. Results in 2004 were very similar to the previous year although the number of candidates almost doubled.

147. In work seen, standards are above average. This reflects good achievement as the subject is attracting increasing numbers whose attainment on entry is no better than average. Students use subject specific terminology accurately and undertake individual, paired and group research well. In oral presentations they feed back their findings with increasing confidence, justifying them when challenged. Students express themselves clearly and accurately in extended writing and make detailed personal notes from class discussions, although these contain too many and repeated errors in spelling and grammar.
148. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Students feel very well known and supported by their teachers. Teachers use their considerable subject expertise and high expectations to set challenging tasks. In a lesson on Hitler students showed an excellent understanding of the different schools of historical thought and offered convincing syntheses of these in their explanations of his rise. Work is regularly marked although there are variations in the amount of comment indicating the scope for improvement and there is insufficient monitoring and correction of errors in literacy. Students get plenty of practice in acquiring the necessary examination skills and benefit from very detailed revision and study support guides.
149. The subject is very well led. The department has a high profile in the school and is attracting increasing numbers. There is a large team of teachers who co-operate closely, but there are insufficient specialist rooms for them all. This affects achievement as lessons sometimes take place in cramped accommodation without appropriate teaching aids. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

### **Design and technology**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well because of good teaching.
- All A-level candidates in the last three years have gained at least a pass grade.
- Examination results at the higher grades of A and B are restricted because students are reticent to take risks and challenge their creative thinking.
- A limitation of CAD/CAM in earlier years has had an impact on extending designing.

### **Commentary**

150. Results in A-level examinations in 2003 were average but with a lower proportion of grades A and B than found nationally. This has been caused partly by a lack of good ICT facilities but nevertheless the results represent good achievement given students' attainment on entry and their GCSE results.
151. Standards seen during the inspection were consistent with expectations for this stage in the course. The achievement of Year 12 students is satisfactory. Product design is a new approach for them. They are struggling with the demands of preparing for lessons where discussion of design principles relies on reading and research being completed independently before the lesson. Year 13 students achieved well in their AS modules and have started the second year of their course with confidence and clear ideas of what they must do to improve. Their achievement is good. Access to ICT has improved and students use CAD (computer-aided design) very effectively to record their ideas and CAM (computer-aided manufacturing) to give a professional finish to their products. Digital photography is used well to record processes such as prototype modelling, bringing students' design modifications to life.
152. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use their industrial and commercial experience to aid students' understanding of product design. Two-hour sessions have a range of activities planned to introduce variety, maintain the pace of learning and give very good opportunities for individual mentoring. Students have good relationships with staff and express confidence in their teachers,

although the resources and accommodation are unsatisfactory for 21<sup>st</sup> century designing and making. Good links forged with the library are providing additional resources. Teachers are capitalising effectively on a BTec computer course run at the college to supplement the lack of computer access earlier in students' design and technology work.

153. Leadership of the course is good and management is satisfactory. Teachers work well as a team and strive to encourage independent, creative thinking. The new acting head of department is starting to use data to establish the monitoring of teaching and learning and target areas of sixth form work that need to improve. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

154. Media studies and music were inspected in detail and art was sampled. In **art** the 2003 A-level results were below average but showed improvement in 2004. Achievement is satisfactory. Most students choose interesting topics for their work, use media, including ICT, confidently, but standards are below average in their observational work and their use of sketchbooks. As a result their work sometimes lacks the conviction of direct experience. In the two lessons observed teaching, learning and achievement were satisfactory in most respects but a few students worked too slowly because the teaching lacked urgency and provided them with insufficient expressive skills.

### **Media studies**

Provision in media studies is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Media studies is a popular course and students value the interactive and practical approach which enables them to become independent learners.
- Good challenge and intellectual rigour underpin good teaching and lead to good learning.
- Management of the department is unsatisfactory because there is insufficient monitoring of classroom practice.
- Assessment does not systematically show students how to improve their work.
- Accommodation and resources are very good and promote good learning.

### **Commentary**

155. Results in the A-level examinations in 2003 were close to the national average, although below those in 2002, which were well above average. Boys performed better than girls, and all students gained at least Grade D. Results in 2004 were similar. Students on average performed as predicted by their GCSE results, which represents broadly satisfactory achievement. Work in lessons and in students' files seen during the inspection confirms that standards are average. Students gain a confidence with the technical language of the subject and rapidly develop the skills that enable them to analyse media texts critically and recognise how programme makers can manipulate the viewer. However, as the examination board's feedback points out, they are less skilled at evaluating their own practical projects.
156. Teaching and learning are good. Although the teachers are not specialists, they are enthusiasts and have very good subject knowledge and this enables them to engage and enthuse their students. They have high expectations of their students and use a wide range of intellectually demanding materials and methods to help students develop their knowledge and skills. Students are encouraged to undertake independent study and they enjoy this aspect of their work. They are very positive about the subject and recognise its value in their development as discriminating media consumers. A relative weakness is that marking does not adequately show students how to improve their work.
157. Media studies teachers work well together as a team but otherwise the management of the subject is unsatisfactory because there is insufficient monitoring of classroom practice and not enough use of assessment and performance data to track students' progress and improve standards. The result of this

is that while achievement overall is satisfactory this hides the fact that in AS and A-level examinations some gain one or two grades above that predicted while others fail to meet their predicted grades.

158. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection. The numbers taking the subject have increased significantly and there have been recent improvements to accommodation and resources.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The head of department leads an unstinting drive to meet the needs of all students.
- Teachers provide excellent care and support in an unceasing effort to further raise standards and enable the students to develop as mature young musicians.
- The very high standard of extra-curricular activities gives students opportunities for extending their performing skills.
- Excellent relationships between teachers and students help to promote excellent learning.
- Music technology resources are inadequate and having an adverse impact on standards.

### **Commentary**

159. The numbers entered for A-level and AS-level examinations in music in 2003 were too small for reliable comparisons to be made with national results. However, all candidates passed the examination and the average point score in both examinations was above the national average point score. The improved results in 2004 represent good achievement when compared with students' attainment on entry to the school. The number of students taking music examinations in the sixth form is growing, with members of the scholarship class sitting their public examinations a year earlier than normal.
160. These improving standards are reflected in work seen during the inspection both in lessons and in students' work. This is because of the excellent teaching and the effort the students contribute to their own learning. Music technology students in Year 12 are already able to input musical parts onto the computer and edit and manipulate the sounds confidently. In a Year 12 music lesson students were able to sight sing accurately a madrigal and knowledgeably compare its texture and compositional techniques with madrigals by other composers. In a Year 13 lesson students listened to Duruflé's Requiem and engaged in discussion about the similarities and differences with Haydn's Nelson Mass.
161. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. All lessons are a continuous learning experience with the students well challenged by the teachers' probing questions. Basic music examples become transformed into short reinforcement sessions that require the students to have immediate access to previously learnt knowledge. Both teachers act as excellent role models, able to provide musically performed examples or computer demonstrations when appropriate. Students are grateful for the very helpful marking which clearly identifies areas for improvement. Teachers make every effort to ensure that students are able to perform to their highest possible level, both academically and practically.
162. The excellent leadership and management are further contributory factors in promoting high standards. The head of department is highly efficient and has built a team of like-minded teachers, dedicated to enabling students to achieve very high standards. The recently acquired computers have been funded by proceeds from concerts and other student fund-raising activities. However there is still a shortage of music technology equipment to meet the syllabus requirements of A-level music technology. In order to meet the demands of the practical examinations, a series of concerts is held each year in which students can perform their items. One of these concerts was held during the inspection with the students acquitting themselves to a high musical standard, much to the obvious enjoyment of the audience.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

## Physical education

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are improving and students achieve well because the quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The subject makes a good contribution to students' personal development.
- Students with special educational needs are very well supported.
- Marking is not linked closely enough to examination grade criteria.
- In a minority of lessons, students are not given enough responsibility to prepare topics in advance.

### Commentary

163. In the 2003 A-level examination, results were above average and improved on the previous year. In the A-level examination in 2004, four of the seven candidates obtained Grades A or B and all passed. Students generally achieved well in comparison with their starting points on entry to the course as measured by their success GCSE examinations. Course completion rates are good.
164. Students currently in Year 13 do well to maintain standards comparable to their performance at AS-level. In lessons and work seen during the inspection they make good progress in exercise physiology and psychology of sport because the learning is tailored well to reflect their own sporting interests. Writing is well informed and of a good length. Work in portfolios of personal performance shows a generally good understanding of their own strengths and limitations in their chosen activities based on a good understanding of relevant theory. However, the quality of their evaluation of their improvement programmes varies, and the work of a few students is also characterised by weak organisational and presentation skills. Year 12 students are making rapid initial progress, evident in the quality of their confident discussion of the differing characteristics of recreational and sporting activities.
165. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers make good use of their subject knowledge and experience, enhanced in some cases by specialist qualification in biology, to set challenging tasks based on a good understanding of students preferred learning styles. Learning is linked well to the demands of subject specification. Students with special learning needs are particularly well supported ensuring that their achievement is high. Students appreciate the quality of personal and academic support provided by their teachers who are often prepared to "go the extra mile" on their behalf with one to one tuition or extra revision lessons. However, on some occasions, insufficient responsibility is given to students to prepare for lessons through prior research of topics. Marking, though regular and generally helpful, is not precise enough in indicating the ways that the students' work meets the relevant grade criteria. Most students sporting achievements are high and they recognise and appreciate the way that their learning helps them to improve further. Their personal development is enhanced by the provision of a good range of opportunities to obtain recognised coaching qualifications and work with younger pupils in their own school and beyond.
166. Examination results have improved since the previous inspection and numbers choosing to follow advanced courses are increasing. The subject is well managed and good planning is ensuring that the subject will benefit from opportunities offered by the school's designation as a science college.

## BUSINESS

### Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching in business studies is very good.
- The advanced vocational course is very successful and has very good links with the local community.
- Leadership and management of the business studies department are very good.
- Teachers operate in a very supportive environment and work very effectively as a team.
- There has been some inconsistency in recent examination results.

### **Commentary**

167. In 2003, results in the Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE) in business were average, with all candidates achieving at least a pass grade. The performance of male students was better than that of female students. This represented good achievement. In A-level business studies, results were close to the national average. The results in 2004 indicate a lower level of attainment, particularly in the higher grades in both the VCE and A-level courses.
168. The standard of work seen during the inspection in lessons and in students' portfolios was consistently above average. Students' responses in the AS and A-level work demonstrate good progress in understanding and knowledge since the start of the courses. Students on the VCE course are able to demonstrate a very good understanding of course requirements. They have good links with local community and business organisations as a result of developing good communication skills, including effective business use of the telephone and e-mail. ICT skills are developed well in all courses. Students are able to construct suitable spreadsheets and databases for recording and analysing information and make good use of the Internet for research.
169. The department, which is very well led and managed, consists of a mixture of well-established and newer staff who work very effectively together as a team. Teachers are very good at using their strengths within the departmental team. Teaching seen in lessons and evidence from students' work indicates that teaching is consistently very good in all courses. Lessons are very well planned, have good pace and use a wide range of effective resources.
170. Assessment procedures are well established and effective. Students on the VCE course receive particularly good support in this respect. Departmental analysis indicates that the most students reach or exceed their predicted grades. The overall performance of the department is evaluated in detail and strategies are already in place to improve attainment in areas where there was a fall in the proportion of higher grades this year. Business studies did not feature in the last inspection report.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

171. In Year 12 a range of optional enrichment courses is offered to students including citizenship, general studies, science for public understanding and physical education. A key skills course in ICT is offered and is effective in extending students' knowledge and understanding.
172. During the inspection citizenship was sampled. It is taught as an optional subject to AS-level as part of the enrichment programme for Year 12 students. In 2004 17 students were entered and all passed the examination with six students achieving Grades A or B. Teaching is good and enables students to learn well, make good gains in knowledge and understanding and develop good analytical skills. They demonstrate enthusiasm for the subject, work productively and collaborate very well.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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