

INSPECTION REPORT

QUEEN'S PARK HIGH SCHOOL

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111397

Headteacher: Andrew Firman

Lead inspector: William Goodall

Dates of inspection: 4th - 7th October 2004

Inspection number: 268884

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Community
Age range of students: 11 to 18
Gender of students: Mixed
Number on roll: 894

School address: Queen's Park
Chester
Postcode: CH4 7AE

Telephone number: (01244) 675 468
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Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Mr Peter Whitby

Date of previous inspection: 14th September 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Queen's Park High School is a comprehensive school taking boys and girls from the ages of 11 to 18; it is situated near to the centre of Chester. There are 894 students in the school, including 169 in the sixth form. Numbers in the school are quite stable, although the sixth form has increased in size recently. The students come from a wide area with very varied socio-economic backgrounds, and the full range of abilities is represented. The attainment of the students on entry at 11 is around the national average. At present the proportion of students with special educational needs is high, and that of students with statements very high. The school accommodates two groups of students with special needs who are allocated to the school on the basis of behavioural or learning difficulties. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is also high. There are few students whose first language is not English, and almost all pupils are of a white British origin. It is a specialist Visual Arts College that, over the past four years, has also been awarded Sportsmark, Healthy Schools, Investors in People, an Education Extra Certificate of Distinction and a Schools' Achievement Award.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15127	W Goodall	Lead inspector	
11072	S Elomari	Lay inspector	
32082	W Lockwood	Team inspector	English
19379	G Coombs	Team inspector	Mathematics
4293	C Warn	Team inspector	Geography
15458	W Dewar	Team inspector	History Work-related learning
20619	J Hazlewood	Team inspector	ICT Vocational courses
2754	G Butler	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
16891	R Worth	Team inspector	Music
2646	J Wild	Team inspector	Physical education
17799	W Stoddart	Team inspector	Science; physics
3552	D Darwood	Team inspector	Religious education Citizenship
33244	R Chambers	Team inspector	Special educational needs
4877	S Smith	Team inspector	Art and design
27351	M Stanton	Team inspector	Design and technology
11913	M Howard	Team inspector	Psychology English as an additional language

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Queen's Park High School, a mixed comprehensive school of 894 students, including a sixth form of 169, near the centre of Chester, was inspected on 4th to the 7th of October 2004 by an inspection team led by William Goodall.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school. The headteacher provides very good leadership, supported by good leadership and management from governors and other key staff. Students' attainment is satisfactory in the main school, and good in the sixth form. Over two thirds of students stay on to the sixth form. Students' achievement, in terms of how well they are reaching their potential, is good. The school is very inclusive and has a positive ethos. Teaching, learning and behaviour are good, as are students' attitudes. The sixth form is very effective. The school and community have benefited from specialist arts college status. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very clear leadership and direction, especially by the headteacher.
- Standards in examinations are well above national averages in the sixth form.
- Students' achievement is good, their care and welfare are very good.
- Provision for students with special educational needs is very good.
- There are very strong links with the community, the provision for enriching students' learning is very good, and the arts college status has a very positive impact.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is still inconsistent, and good examples are not always identified and shared.
- Assessment is not always used well to identify which areas students need to work on to improve.

Since its last inspection in 1998, the school has made satisfactory progress. The issues identified then have been addressed, but arrangements for collective worship remain unsatisfactory. The school has set up monitoring systems, and gathers information about students' performance, but both of these measures now need further development for them to have a positive impact on standards. Attendance has been improved. Standards compared to those of similar schools, based on free school meals, are still very good, as they were in 1998. In addition the gaining of specialist arts college status has been very positive for the school and its links with the community. The curriculum has improved, with more choice of vocational courses and enrichment activities. The provision for students with special educational needs has been enhanced, and the care and welfare of students have been improved. The role of governors and managers has been developed satisfactorily.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Students' achievement is good. Standards were around the national average in 2003. However, when they were compared with those of schools with students of similar prior attainment, they were low at the ages of both 14 and 16. They were much better in 2004. In that year, the students achieved higher scores than the targets the school had set, and better than were predicted from their previous attainment. Achievement is satisfactory by the age of 14 and it is good by the age of 16 because students make good progress in English, mathematics and science, and also in history and

physical education. They make very good progress in art and design. Girls generally do better than boys, as is the case nationally. Students with additional educational needs achieve well and no particular groups of students underperform. Sixth form students attained well above average standards in their A/AS level examinations in 2003, and the results in 2004 were similar.

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average.
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

The development of students' personal qualities is good. Their attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good in the main school. They are very good in the sixth form. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now satisfactory, and very good in the sixth form. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The opportunities for extending students' awareness of, and involvement in, the arts have been greatly enhanced by the arts college initiative.

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Teaching and learning are good overall, particularly in Years 10 to 11 and in the sixth form. The use of assessment to improve students' work and homework is satisfactory. Targets are set accurately, but the specific guidance to help students know what to do to improve is not sufficiently developed. The broad range of curriculum opportunities is good, especially in the sixth form. The opportunities for enrichment provided by the curriculum are excellent. The quantity and quality of accommodation and resources are also good, although some accommodation for music is poor. Arrangements to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety are very good. Links with parents and the community are also very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good, both in the main school and the sixth form. The headteacher is providing very clear direction. He is well supported by governors, senior management and other key staff, but the good monitoring procedures that have been developed do not identify good practice across the school so that it can be shared to improve standards. The governors' role is carried out effectively. They know the school well and are clear about what needs to be done and how to achieve it. The leadership of the Arts College is very good. The budget is managed very well, and administration is very efficient.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Students and parents support the school strongly. The main concerns of the parents who returned the questionnaires and of those who attended the meeting were behaviour and homework. Some concerns about homework are valid; its use is not consistent. Students share the views on poor behaviour and express the view that some teachers manage it much better than others. Behaviour is good, but there are some isolated instances of poor behaviour, which the students say are dealt with well.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school needs to do to continue its improvement are:

- to emphasise more precisely to students the steps that they should take to improve their work further; and
- to ensure that the monitoring procedures that have been developed have an impact on standards through the identification and sharing of good practice;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- the governors need to review the provision for collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT QUEEN'S PARK HIGH SCHOOL

This sixth form of 169 students is gradually increasing in number. Over two thirds of students have stayed on in 2004. A wide range of A and AS level GCEs and vocational courses is offered.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The effectiveness of the sixth form is **very good**. Results in A and AS level GCE examinations have been consistently high and amongst the best in the local authority area. Vocational courses have recently been extended and more students have stayed on. Teaching and learning are good overall. The students observed were in the first weeks of their courses and they are prepared very well for their examinations over the course of the year. Support, advice and guidance are good, there is a good range of academic, vocational and enrichment courses, and the sixth form plays a significant role in the school. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Finances are monitored closely and the sixth form is very cost-effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very high standards in examinations in both Years 12 and 13.
- Close pastoral and academic support. Students have access to expert and up-to-date advice. The teachers know them well.
- Students have very positive attitudes and their behaviour is very good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- The sixth formers play a strong role in the school and community.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English is good. Students reach above average standards through good teaching, which engages and supports all of them. Provision in French is good. Standards are above average and good teaching helps students to progress well.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is very good. Students perform consistently better than in their other subjects, and their attainment is well above average.
Science	Provision in physics is good. Students achieve well because of very good teaching and attitudes, and their attainment is above average.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in design and technology is good, standards are average, but teaching is very good.

Humanities	<p>Provision in geography is good. Students find the work stimulating, relevant and interesting, and their standards are above average.</p> <p>Provision in psychology is good, standards are in line with course expectations and teaching is good.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Provision in art and design is excellent. Students show high levels of independence and creativity and achieve very well.</p> <p>Provision in music is good. Students respond well to demanding teaching and their standards are average.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<p>Provision in physical education is good. Students are motivated to succeed and produce work of an above average standard.</p> <p>Provision in travel and tourism and leisure and recreation is good. These courses are taught together, but standards are average and students have positive attitudes.</p>

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

Arrangements for the induction of students into the sixth form are thorough and students are well supported when they enter Year 12. Clear systems ensure that students have access to the advice, support and guidance they need. Students have frequent opportunities to meet their tutors so that any concerns may be dealt with quickly. Careers advice is readily available and the sixth form area contains a good range of prospectuses and other relevant information. Students are well supported as they apply to university or employment. The many opportunities they have to contribute to the school community help to prepare them well for life beyond school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management in the sixth form are both **good**. The senior leadership team and the head of sixth form provide a clear sense of purpose and direction for students and staff. Pastoral management is good and the monitoring of students' progress is central to the role of the tutors. The good management of the curriculum enables a very wide range of subjects to be offered at GCE A and AS level, and, recently, in vocational courses. The day-to-day management and administration of the sixth form are good. The examination results are well analysed. As a result, there is a clear vision for development with a focus on improving results and maximising the achievement of individuals. Students have clear targets and there are high expectations of them to work maturely and independently. Teaching is generally monitored but needs to be more rigorously evaluated, so that the ways in which students learn most effectively can be better identified. Sixth form finances are very well managed. The very good results mean that the school sixth form provides very good value for money.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form students interviewed were very supportive of what the school does for them, enjoyed their studies and felt they were given a lot of useful information and advice. They were surprised at the concerns raised in the questionnaire about behaviour and support for them. The inspection team agreed with them on this and noted the small number of the questionnaires returned. The school does seek their views and acts on them, although not all students are actively involved.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards of attainment are satisfactory. Standards in national tests and examinations at the age of 14 and 16 were broadly in line with national expectations in 2003, and improved in 2004, and are above the school's targets and predictions. Standards in the sixth form were well above the national averages in 2003 and were similar in 2004. Students' achievement is good. Students with special educational needs achieve very well throughout. The achievement of students who have been identified as gifted and talented, and the small number from ethnic minority heritages is satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is **good**.
- The achievement of students with special educational needs is **very good**.
- Results in national tests and examinations improved greatly in 2004.
- Standards in ICT in Year 9 are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

1. The primary school test results of students who have started at the school over the past four years indicate that their attainment was close to the national average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In the National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds in 2003, the overall performance of students in these core subjects was around the national average, and well above that of students in schools with a similar proportion of free school meals. However, compared with students who had a similar level of attainment at the age of 11 their progress was well below average, making the overall trend below the national. While the trend of results in mathematics has been consistent, results in English and science have been improving. The results for 2004 were a big improvement on this.
2. The standards seen demonstrate that in Year 9 and Year 11 standards overall are broadly in line with national expectations, as they were at the time of the last inspection. Standards overall were around the national average in tests and examinations in 2003, the last date for which comparisons are available. In that year, achievement measured against how well the students had done compared to those in schools with a similar level of prior attainment, was poor for both 14 and 16 year olds, but results improved greatly in 2004. In that year, the students achieved higher scores than the targets the school had set, and better than was predicted from their previous attainment. A-level results were well above national averages in 2003, and were similar in 2004.
3. Standards in Year 9 are above national expectations in English, and also in art and design and physical education, but are below those expected nationally in ICT. The students make better progress on their GCSE courses; standards are above national expectations in English, mathematics and science, and also in design and technology, geography, and physical education, with very high standards in art and design. Standards are below those expected nationally in the leisure and tourism course. In the sixth form,

standards in the subjects inspected are above national expectations in English language, French, physics, music and physical education, they are well above in mathematics, and are very high in art and design. Girls are generally doing better than boys, as they do nationally, otherwise no particular groups underperform.

- Students' achievement is good, particularly in English, mathematics, science, geography, physical education and vocational studies, and it is excellent in art and design. Students with special educational needs achieve well. Sixth form students achieve very well, particularly in their A and AS level examinations, where results are well above the national averages.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.2 (34)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	34.9 (35.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	33.3 (34.6)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 138 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- The percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades in the examinations for 16 year- olds has steadily improved up to 2004, when the school attained its best ever results, with over 60 per cent of students gaining these grades. The Fischer Family Trust analysis, a sophisticated and very specific measure of improvement, showed that they had done better than predicted and better than the school's targets for the year. The proportion gaining at least one A* to G grade remained low. In 2003, the most recent year for which there are national comparisons, the scores had dipped. The figures were still around the national average and were good compared to those of other schools with a similar proportion of free school meals. However, the figures were very low in comparison to schools with students of similar previous attainment.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	48 (55)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	88 (90)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	93 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	32.8 (36)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 142 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Observations of lessons and reviews of work judged that standards of work in Years 7 to 9 are above expectations in English, and close to those expected nationally in all other subjects except ICT and geography, and are well above this level in art and design. In ICT they are below expectations, partly due to the lack of adequate time for the subject in previous years. Students' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good in English, design and technology, physical education and modern foreign languages. It is very good in art and design. In almost all other subjects, including mathematics and science, achievement is

satisfactory. It is unsatisfactory in ICT, despite the extra lesson that has just been allocated in Year 9.

7. Standards by the end of Year 11 are around the national expectation in history, citizenship, physical education, religious education, modern foreign languages, ICT and vocational education. They are above that level in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, geography and well above in art and design. Students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good in English, mathematics, science, citizenship, design and technology, geography, history, physical education, religious education and vocational education. It is very good in art and design.
8. Standards of literacy in most subjects are satisfactory and sometimes better but they can limit students' progress, for example, in geography. The implementation of a programme of literacy across the curriculum has not been consistent in all areas. However, there is good practice, in physical education, where key words are well taught. Similarly, in art and design, a clear focus is placed upon the speaking and writing skills necessary to make effective presentations.
9. Standards of numeracy across the school are satisfactory. Students use their mathematical skills competently in a number of subjects, notably geography, science, religious education, design and technology and art and design. In geography, students use graphs to analyse field-work data; in art and design, students estimate and approximate when observing angles and straight edges, and in religious education, concepts of infinity are discussed. However, these occur as part of the curriculum in these subjects and are not part of a whole-school focus on numeracy across the curriculum. A draft numeracy policy has been produced but it has yet to have a significant impact across the school.
10. Standards of ICT used across the curriculum are in line with expectations in Years 7, 8 and 9, and above them in Year 10 and 11 courses. Students have good access to computers and this supports learning in many subjects, in particular art and design and in design and technology, and encourages good presentation techniques. There is good guidance in the use of ICT in other subjects. However, teachers' skills are not yet developed well enough to ensure that students consistently build on the skills developed in ICT lessons. The current standards of work related learning are satisfactory and the provision is good; it is well placed for continuing development. There is already evidence of the positive impact of programmes on individual and identified groups of pupils within the school.
11. There are some variations between the achievement of boys and girls across different subjects but these are not significant. Overall, girls' achievement is better than the boys' and broadly reflects the national picture. No particular groups of students underperform.
12. The school has developed a caring atmosphere that has enabled a high number of students with statements to access mainstream classes. There are two groups of students who are admitted to the school for support, based on their behavioural or learning difficulties. The number of these students is therefore well above the national average. However, the very good support from teachers and teaching assistants ensures that, by ages 14 and 16, the progress of students with statements of special educational needs and students at School Action Plus level has been good and they have reached their individual targets, frequently overcoming significant learning or behavioural

difficulties in the process. In all years, students with special educational needs at School Action are achieving as well as their classmates, relative to their prior attainment. They respond well to the support they are given and many are developing into independent learners. They achieve across the full range of subjects and are fully involved in the life of the school.

Sixth form

Standards in the sixth form are **above** the national average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The sixth form students have achieved **very well** in their A and AS level examinations compared to predictions based on their GCSE grades.
- Standards seen in class, in folders and on display indicate attainment that is **above** the national picture.
- There is a very low drop-out rate from the two-year courses.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	95.3 (95.4)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	31.1 (41.4)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per student	313.5 (313.7)	234.2 (232.9)

There were 66 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

13. In the 2003 examinations, Year 13 students attained overall results that were well above the national average for students taking A-level courses. Results were similar at the time of the last inspection. The analysis of the Year 13 results over the past three years shows that students do very well compared with other schools in the local education authority's area. In the most recent examinations, in 2004, the average point score per examination improved, although the total points per student fell slightly.
14. The trend in results is improving consistently, and has been above the national average since the last inspection. Similarly students continue to do better than their predictions based on their GCSE results.
15. Standards in the sixth form are above expectations and achievement is very good. Students are prepared very well for examinations over the course of the year. Standards observed during the inspection were good in English, science, geography, physical education and modern foreign languages, very good in mathematics and excellent in art and design. They are around the national expectation in design and technology, music and vocational courses. Standards in literacy are above the national expectation and they are around it in numeracy.
16. Compared with their prior attainment in GCSE, the students' achievement is good in English, science, geography, physical education, modern foreign languages and vocational courses. It is very good in mathematics and excellent in art and design. Improving standards reflect the very good teaching students receive and the very good attitudes with which the majority of students approach their learning.

17. Some students with special educational needs continue their education in the sixth form, successfully completing a range of courses. This opportunity successfully re-engages students who have become disaffected, and they achieve levels appropriate to their prior attainment.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students in Years 7 to 11 have good attitudes to learning. In the sixth form, attitudes are very good. Behaviour is good overall, although there is a minority of boys whose behaviour is at times unsatisfactory. In the sixth form, behaviour is very good. Students' personal development is good overall. Their social, moral and spiritual development is good and cultural development is very good. Attendance is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. Punctuality is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sixth form students are very committed to their studies and to the school.
- Students in Years 7 to 11 have good attitudes to learning and appreciate the very wide range of activities provided for them outside lessons.
- Most students behave well and form good relationships with others.
- A small minority of students in Years 7 to 11 sometimes behave inappropriately.
- Students' personal development is good and their cultural development is very strong.
- Levels of attendance have improved significantly in the last year and attendance is very well monitored.

Commentary

18. Almost all students have a positive attitude to learning, as was noted in the previous inspection report. They are willing to work and usually enjoy their lessons, especially in subjects such as art and design, design and technology and physical education. Students in all years generally listen well to their teacher and try hard to complete the work set. However, the written work they produce is occasionally untidy and not well laid out. Students' appreciation of the very wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, particularly the great variety of sports, is evident in the large numbers who participate.
19. Behaviour is good throughout the school and almost all students behave very well. The school sets high expectations for students' behaviour and most respond well. Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties are very well supported so that they rarely disrupt the learning of others and learn to take increasing control of their own behaviour. The reward system motivates students well, partly because they are involved in choosing the rewards offered. Much artwork is displayed around the school and is treated with considerable respect. Students form good relationships with one another, teachers and other staff. There is a good level of mutual respect. Students appreciate that they should report bullying when it occurs; they state that teachers then deal with it quickly and effectively.
20. The behaviour of a minority of students was a concern of the parents and students who responded to the questionnaires sent out before the inspection. In Years 7, 8 and 9, the behaviour of a few boys, both in the classroom and around the school, is occasionally unsatisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, the numbers involved are very small, because of

action by the school. Behaviour was very good at the time of the previous inspection, it is now good. In lessons, unacceptable behaviour is well handled by most teachers so that it does not affect the learning of others. Around the school, however, a few students can cause disruption when they run in the corridors or on the stairs. The school takes a firm line on verbal or physical violence, and this is reflected in the number of exclusions.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	764	88	6
White – any other White background	13	4	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	9	1	0
No ethnic group recorded	60	6	2

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

- Students’ personal development is good and they develop into confident young people who are willing to take an active part in the life of the school. Assemblies and work in subjects such as English, geography and personal, health, social and citizenship education (PSHCE) develop students’ ability to make decisions on moral issues. Students have many opportunities to co-operate, for example, in team games and project work, which help to develop a sense of social responsibility. Students collaborate very well in lessons when working in pairs or small groups. They have many opportunities for reflection, for example in assemblies or in religious studies lessons. Cultural development is very good. Students are asked to consider the needs of individuals and different groups work together well for projects in design and technology. Work in art and design, music, religious studies and other subjects offers students opportunities to experience and discuss aspects of their own and others’ cultural traditions. The Visual Arts College makes an outstanding contribution in this area.

Attendance

- Attendance has increased significantly in the last year. Figures for 2003-2004 show attendance in Years 7 to 11 at 91 per cent. Unauthorised absence remains high because the school, to its credit, does not authorise holiday absences in excess of ten days or other breaks where the reasons given are not considered valid. Attendance data is monitored very closely and parents are contacted quickly whenever there is an unexplained absence. Good or significantly improved attendance is rewarded. The school has developed a good range of strategies to help students whose attendance is a cause for concern to improve their attendance and achievement. Attendance groups, run by the learning mentor, are successful in raising the attendance of targeted individuals. College placements motivate students in Years 10 and 11 well and help to ensure that they complete their education. Almost all students arrive on time in the morning. Most lessons begin promptly.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	7.2
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	1.7
National data	1.1

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

Sixth form

23. Students' very good attitudes to learning are shown by their very good attendance, punctuality and behaviour, which make a significant contribution to the very high standards they achieve. They respond very well to the help and support they receive from the sixth form staff and develop a very mature approach to studying. They work very hard to achieve the examination grades they need to further their career aspirations.

24. The school offers students a very wide range of opportunities to contribute to the school community. Students are very willing to take these up and become very good role-models. They supervise at breaks and lunchtimes, chair the school council, act as mentors and reading buddies to younger students and provide very significant help in running extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport. These responsibilities help to ensure that students are confident, mature and ready to take their place in the world beyond school as well as contributing to the smooth running of the school. In sport, the students' contribution enables a very wide range of extra-curricular activities to be provided.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **good**. Assessment is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have a good command of the subjects that they teach and prepare their lessons well.
- They work hard to include all students in all lesson activities, frequently energising students to do well even if they are reluctant or hesitant.
- Teaching and support assistants help students to make better progress and to work more confidently.
- Examination and test results are analysed in detail.
- In a few cases, most notably in Years 8 and 9, the content, pace and intellectual challenge of lessons do not fully match the learning needs of the most able students.
- Students' work is usually marked and assessed accurately, but marking does not always give enough indication about how to improve further.

Commentary

The following table lists the inspectors' evaluation of teaching during the inspection. The quality of learning matched this very closely.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection of 140 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
12 (9%)	34 (24%)	57 (41%)	33 (24%)	4 (3%)	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.

25. The quality of teaching shows an improvement from the strong position at the time of the previous inspection in 1998. The proportion of lessons characterised by very good or excellent teaching is the same, but there has been a reduction in the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching from five per cent to three per cent. The biggest area of improvement has been in the conversion of satisfactory teaching into good teaching. Teaching is now good or better in two thirds of lessons. The management of students has improved, as have aspects of the marking and assessment of their work and the wider use of new technology to support their learning. The impact of the specialist college on teaching is especially evident in the arts subjects. The quality of teaching represents a significant strength of the school, and is having a vital impact on students' achievement. Students spoke warmly about the way they were taught in the majority of lessons.
26. In the main school, teaching in one third of the lessons seen was very good or excellent. The proportion of such lessons was notably higher in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. There is some excellent teaching in art and design and physical education, and some very good teaching in English, mathematics, design and technology, geography and music. The main strengths of this teaching include:
- activities are very well designed to ensure that students of all levels of attainment can make very good progress and achieve remarkable outcomes;
 - students are given clear explanations, plenty of guidance when needed and top quality demonstrations, all of which build up their confidence;
 - any students who are reluctant to learn or who are shy or inattentive are drawn into the lesson thanks to creative and relevant things to do coupled with much encouragement;
 - students actively participate in the lesson, often helping each other to improve their performance;
 - lessons are enriched by the skilful use of new technology, library resources, fieldwork activities, displays and visitors' special talents;
 - homework is designed to extend the work done in class and forms an important part of the next lesson;
 - opportunities are found for students to express sophisticated and subtle ideas or to articulate their personal feelings about an issue; and
 - outcomes are carefully evaluated to provide a clear insight into what to do next to maintain impressive rates of progress.
27. Some of the learning approaches recommended by the National Key Stage 3 Strategy are beginning to have a positive effect, though not evenly across all subjects. These approaches include lively starter activities to remind students of what they have already learned and a greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy in different subjects. Such approaches are also being used by some teachers in Years 10 to 13. Students with special educational needs are supported well by teachers and teaching assistants, and so make good progress in their learning.

28. In lessons where the teaching is satisfactory rather than good, students make adequate progress but at least some of them are not given enough opportunity to do better than this. The main reasons for this are:
- the pace of lessons is too slow to engage all students fully, leading to reduced productivity;
 - expectations and resources do not match the needs of the higher-attaining students to a sufficient degree;
 - students are not given enough chances to think and work independently, mainly because the teacher does too much for them;
 - small numbers of uncooperative students (mostly boys) demand a great deal of attention from the teacher, so slowing down the progress made by others;
 - too few visual resources are available, and sometimes there is a heavy reliance on a limited range of worksheets.
29. Teaching was unsatisfactory in three lessons in Years 7 to 9. The main reasons for this were a lack of urgency, the purpose of the lesson not properly understood by students, too much off-task conversation and the teacher speaking for too long. No poor teaching was seen.
30. The quality of the marking of students' work is mostly satisfactory, with pockets of good practice. A policy statement was produced in 1998 that defined a whole-school approach to marking. This identified the key purposes of marking as being to monitor progress, motivate students, collect information to inform future planning and to provide feedback to students and parents. In practice, whilst most work is corrected by teachers and much of it is given a mark or grade, not all of the school's intentions are being consistently fulfilled. The best marking does provide students with a clear view of how to progress further but there are also plenty of cases where teachers respond mainly with comments on effort and attitude. Some teachers do not emphasise with sufficient precision the next steps that students should take in order to improve their work further.
31. Assessment is satisfactory and some elements are done very well. However, the main weakness is that students are not given adequate guidance about how to improve their work. One area of considerable strength is the way in which tests and examination results are analysed statistically. Recently this work has been usefully complemented by the use of "value-added" data that links students' performance to predicted grades based on their performance in previous tests. All subject leaders draw up improvement plans based on the evaluation of past results. This duly leads to new professional development opportunities and sometimes to curriculum, personnel, timetable or resource changes. Another area of strength is the way in which the individual learning requirements of students with special educational needs are assessed and met.
32. The ways in which students' current progress is quantified and tracked have greatly improved in recent years. Most teachers now have clear information about the level that each of their students is working at in Years 7 to 9 and the GCSE or GNVQ grade that they are expected to reach in Years 10 and 11. Predicted levels and grades are now being defined with increasing accuracy. Students are made aware of their targets and of their actual level or grade in numerical form. So, for example, a Year 9 student who was interviewed could say that, in a particular subject, he was currently working at level 5.7 and was expected to reach level 6.3 by July next year. However, in many subjects, students are not given enough information and advice about the skills and concepts needed to move from their current level to their target level. Reports and progress

statements tend to contain written targets that are more related to attitude and commitment than to skills and concepts. Some Year 9 students who have already reached their predicted level are now uncertain about what more they should achieve by next July. In some lessons, the specific learning needs of students who were capable of working at different levels were not fully addressed. Students following GCSE and GNVQ courses generally had a much clearer understanding of the grade they could reach and how to get there.

33. Students with special educational needs are well taught. They achieve very well when teachers take account of their individual needs, and adapt approaches to meet them. Learning support assistants make a strong contribution by encouraging the development of individual skills. In very good lessons, there are very good relationships between staff and students, students' views are valued and all students are encouraged to contribute. Teachers have high expectations of students in terms of their behaviour and their work.

The sixth form

Teaching, learning and assessment are **good**.

34. The quality of teaching was very good or excellent in a third of the lessons seen and good or better in three quarters of them. Apart from one isolated lesson, teaching was satisfactory in the remainder. The very considerable strength of the teaching of sixth form students is a vital factor in the good results that they achieve. Many of the strengths of teaching and learning in the main school are found equally in the sixth form. These include:
- high levels of student involvement, thanks to teachers building up their confidence and commitment;
 - clear explanations followed by lively discussions and plenary sessions that summarise and reinforce learning;
 - teachers pushing students to achieve to a higher level;
 - effective use of the Internet to gain access to current information and research data;
 - sophisticated and inspirational individual coaching based on a thorough understanding of the capabilities and needs of each student.
35. In the few less successful lessons, the main limiting factors were inappropriate resources, an over-emphasis on low-level tasks that lacked intellectual challenge and insufficient scope for students to become involved.
36. Students' essays, assignments and tests are marked very thoroughly and students are frequently given a detailed commentary on their performance, together with advice on how to improve. However, the notes that students make in their files are not routinely checked for accuracy.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is **good** in all years. The provision for extra-curricular activities, particularly in the arts and sport is excellent. Accommodation is **satisfactory**. Resources for learning are **good** and library provision is also good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs and interests of all students.
- The excellent range of enrichment opportunities, including extra provision in the arts and sport, enhances the quality of learning.
- Good programmes of personal, social and health education and careers education prepare students for the future.
- Some of the accommodation in the music area is poor.
- Library provision is good.
- The provision for work related learning (WRL) is coherent, effective and meets statutory requirements and it is well placed for continuing development.

Commentary

37. The curriculum in the main school is good. The school provides courses for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and religious education. The curriculum caters well for all needs and gives very good support to students with special educational needs. In Years 10 and 11, students follow a core curriculum but also have a wide and flexible range of choices, including vocational options and drama.
38. There are excellent programmes that enrich students' experiences and after-school activities and the school's Arts College status has done much to help expand and develop this provision. The school makes good provision for careers advice from expert agencies. It is well resourced with suitable books, computer equipment and specialist software.
39. Accommodation is generally satisfactory but it is poor in one music room. Resources are good, but a lack of textbooks limits opportunities in science. There are not enough specialist teachers of ICT. The library provision is good although books in some subjects require updating. Accommodation for learning support is good and well situated.
40. Provision for personal and social education is good. It underpins the strong sense of community, which is central to the ethos of the school, providing firm support for all students' personal development. This has a positive impact on attitudes and behaviour in the school.
41. The co-ordination of support for students whose first language is not English has recently been moved from the special needs area and taken over by the literacy co-ordinator, which is a positive step. The school currently provides support for four students. An identification and assessment system is in place and students' progress is monitored well. The overall provision is satisfactory.
42. Provision for students with special educational needs is very good. They have full access to the curriculum and take a full part in extra-curricular activities. In many subjects, teachers adapt the curriculum well to allow students to work to their strengths and to deal effectively with their areas of difficulty.
43. The school has recently implemented the 'Compass Course' for identified students who are at risk of failure in Key Stage 3. This is an example of excellent inclusive practice which is innovative and collaborative. It is a six-week programme aimed at helping students to develop the skills needed to maintain their place in mainstream classes.

There are clear objectives to the course and the methodology has a strong theoretical base. There are clear criteria for joining and leaving the course. Students on the course express their appreciation of the staff and speak candidly about how it is helping them to address their difficulties. The course offers the students early intervention, continuing support in mainstream classes and a safe haven for break and lunch times. Equally important is the 'open door policy', maintained by the faculty for occasions when relationships break down and students need to be withdrawn from class.

Example of outstanding practice

The "Compass Group" has been created this term to support the development of young people who have attendance difficulties, behavioural difficulties or whose learning difficulties are compounded by forgetfulness and a lack of organization.

Students with difficulties in these areas are identified by teaching staff, support staff and year learning managers. Students' behaviour is assessed through the use of questionnaires completed by teaching staff. Students, parents and learning support faculty staff enter into a contract which reflects a willingness to change on the part of the student.

The emphasis is on helping students make appropriate choices and accept responsibility for their own learning. Students are allocated a key worker and for half the time are taught in their base, learning to share and co-operate, taking turns and being given a greater understanding of emotional intelligence and how the brain functions. Each course lasts for six weeks with a return to full-time lessons at the end of that time.

A key feature of this new course is the determination that good practice, developed by the successful and experienced teachers who have volunteered to participate in the programme, should be identified and widely shared with other colleagues. It is being evaluated regularly to judge the impact on the students.

44. Work-related learning has been developed well. The school has successfully built on existing practice in its provision and development of careers education, work experience, education-business links and vocationally-related courses. The current provision is coherent, effective and meets statutory requirements and it is appropriately and securely founded on the nine elements identified by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. It ensures a coherent programme for all students in Years 10 and 11, whilst allowing for some additional work-based experiences, vocational college courses and mentoring, as appropriate to the specific needs and aspirations of identified students. Through aspects of the programme, students are given knowledge, understanding and experience of work. They also develop their awareness of employment opportunities and skills relevant to enterprise and employment. The school is well placed for continuing developments in this area of its work.

Sixth form

The sixth form curricular provision is **good**.

45. The range of choice for both academic and vocational subjects is good. It is supported by good links with the local college and a collaborative arrangement with a neighbouring school for music provision. In common with the main school, there are very good enrichment programmes and after-school activities and the school's Arts College status has done much to help expand and develop this provision.
46. Provision for careers guidance in the sixth form is good. The school places appropriate emphasis on university entrance and on the full range of further education and

employment-based opportunities. The school's Arts College status has had a significant positive impact on opportunities to work with artists in residence and it has established significant links with partner schools, the local community and businesses, including other arts agencies. ICT provision in art and design, an issue in the last inspection, is now excellent.

Care, guidance and support

The school has very good arrangements to ensure the care, welfare, health and safety of all students. They benefit from very good personal support, advice and guidance throughout their time in the school. Advice and guidance on academic matters are good. Students' views are sought, valued and acted upon very well. The induction procedures for students new to the school are very good. Sixth form students are well supported.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school places a very high priority on students' well-being and its arrangements to meet their personal needs are very effective.
- Advice and support for learning are good and students with special educational needs are very well supported.
- Very good induction arrangements help students settle quickly into the school community.
- Students have regular opportunities to voice their opinions and the school acts upon their suggestions whenever possible.
- Sixth-form students are well advised and supported when they enter the sixth form and well prepared for life beyond school.

Commentary

47. The school has sustained, and built on, the high standards of care noted in the previous report. It provides a safe and caring environment in which students can concentrate on learning. Students feel safe in school because they trust teachers and other staff to have their best interests at heart. Procedures for child protection fully comply with legal requirements and training has recently been provided for all staff. Great care is taken to ensure that health and safety requirements are met. Arrangements for first aid are very good. There is very good provision of personal support, advice and guidance to students throughout their school career. Most students are confident that teachers are approachable and this means that they are likely to share any problems they may have. Although group tutors are the principal contacts for students, there is a wide range of other support available. Students have access to a learning mentor, trained peer mentors and advisors from the 'Connexions' service. This year, a counsellor is available in school. The school makes effective use of the educational welfare officer and other outside agencies. The emphasis is on addressing concerns quickly so that students can concentrate on their work. Students believe that their problems and concerns will be taken seriously and know their care is of a high priority.
48. Tutors monitor the academic achievement of their groups and conduct regular individual reviews of progress. The school has a wealth of data on academic progress but, as yet, this is not being used sufficiently to guide students. Targets are set at review meetings but these usually lack the precision to improve students' learning. In addition, students' work is not always marked regularly so that they do not know what they need to do to

improve. Students are well advised and informed of the options open to them both in Year 9 and in Year 11 so that they make appropriate choices of courses of study. Careers advice is readily available, and the school works with 'Connexions' to maintain contact with former students and to give them support. Students with special educational needs are very well supported. Their needs are identified and accurate learning support programmes are drawn up that are available to all their teachers. Learning support assistants provide very well targeted support in lessons. Statements of special educational need are fully met. Statutory review meetings involve parents, staff and relevant external agencies.

49. The school works closely with primary schools to provide a very good induction programme that enables students to settle quickly and confidently into their new school. Both students and their parents are very well informed about the school and have a good range of opportunities to visit it prior to admission. A significant number of students join the school at times other than at the beginning of Year 7 and they are also helped to settle in very well. Care is taken to place them in classes that best suit their needs. There is very good liaison with other secondary schools and colleges in the area.
50. The school values students' views highly and they are regularly consulted and involved in decisions about change. Questionnaires are used to gain the views of all students on important issues, such as behaviour. Year councils meet regularly so that issues of concern can be raised and debated. These are then taken to the full school council, which is a very good forum for students to put forward their ideas for improving the school. Changes initiated by the council have a positive impact on students' lives. For example, some of the social areas have been refurbished and the facilities improved. Through the council, students are able to question senior members of staff and also become involved in initiatives such as the healthy schools award.

Sixth form

51. Clear systems ensure that students have access to the advice, support and guidance they need. Arrangements for the induction of students into the sixth form are thorough and students are well supported when they enter Year 12. Students have frequent opportunities to meet their tutors so that any concerns may be dealt with quickly. Careers and higher education advice is readily available and the sixth form area contains a good range of prospectuses and other relevant information. Students are well supported as they apply to university, many continue onto higher education, and a great number gain their first choice. The many opportunities they have to contribute to the school community help to prepare them well for life beyond school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has developed a **good** partnership with parents. The links established with the local community and with other schools and colleges are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides parents with a wide range of very useful information and involves them well in its life and work.

- The school has very strong links with its community and works very well in partnership with the community, to mutual benefit.
- Partnerships with other schools and colleges are very strong.
- Sixth form students benefit from the very strong partnerships with the community and with other schools.

Commentary

52. The school has maintained the good partnership with parents noted in the previous report. Parents are very well informed about the school's expectations and routines. The prospectus is well illustrated and clearly set out. The governors' annual report celebrates the previous year's work very well. A notable feature is the 'Guide for Students and Parents', which contains all the information needed by new parents and students in a concise 'A-Z' format. Year learning managers inform parents at an early stage when any concerns arise so that they can work together to resolve the issues. Parents of students with special educational needs are very well informed and involved in decisions about their child's education. Learning support assistants telephone parents of those students with statements of special educational need on a regular basis to inform them of progress. Information provided for parents of students in Years 9 and 11 helps them to guide their child's choices for the next stage of education very effectively. The school is committed to seeking the views of parents. Each year learning manager holds regular home-school forum meetings that enable parents' views of the school to be gathered. These meetings are also used to discuss proposed changes and to review arrangements, so that parents are well involved in the process of change. The School Association is a very active group. The funds they raise help to provide the excellent programme of extra-curricular activities.
53. The school is a real focus for activities within its local community and is used extensively for adult education, Open University courses, sporting and arts events. It benefits from a very significant amount of sponsorship from local business and industry. The school and its community are determined to develop the partnership further. To this end, a community liaison officer has recently been appointed, a post funded jointly by the school and its partners in the community. The school provides an outstanding range of activities that enrich students' experiences. For example, students are actively involved in the city's Sustainable Environmental Education Network and there is an impressive range of visits to places of interest and of visitors, such as theatre groups and the community police. All students take part in work experience placements and students studying for a GNVQ in manufacturing visit a wide range of local businesses as part of their course. The Arts College is an outstanding example of working with the community, which raised a significant proportion of the money needed to bid for specialist status.
54. The school has very good links with its partner schools that help to support students in a variety of ways. Links with the primary schools are very well developed and contribute very well to the ease with which students transfer to secondary education. Pupils from the primary schools have a range of opportunities to visit and to take part in activities, such as pond-dipping. Teachers from the high school provide some lessons in ICT and art and design at partner primary schools. The school is working in partnership with other schools. It works closely with local colleges to provide a wider curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11. This is particularly effective in encouraging disaffected students to complete their education successfully. Links with other schools extend beyond Chester.

The school is involved in an exchange programme that saw a headteacher from Holland visit for a week, acting as a 'critical friend'.

55. The overall quality of annual progress reports is satisfactory, and many are of good quality. However, they do not contain a separate section for personal, social, health and citizenship education, which is a weakness. Subject reports paint a clear picture of the student's strengths but are not consistently informative about their progress. Areas for improvement are not always identified, which means that parents are unclear about how best to help their child.

Sixth form

56. Students benefit from the very strong partnerships the school enjoys with the community and with other educational establishments. The extensive visits and activities enjoyed by students in Years 7 to 11 are also available to the sixth form. For example, a theatre company came into school to explore issues around safe driving. In music, students have some lessons at a nearby high school, which provides additional time and is having a positive impact on standards. Many students make a significant contribution to the school community, for example by running extra-curricular sporting activities, coaching and helping parents' evenings to run smoothly.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is **good**. The governance of the school is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He has a strong commitment to the school and has given a clear sense of direction.
- There are very good financial planning procedures which support school priorities very well.
- Despite improvements in management structures, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in some areas of the curriculum. As a consequence, best practice is not always identified and shared.
- The use of performance data is not consistently used across the school to raise standards.
- The leadership of the work related learning programme is effective and elements within it are well co-ordinated.

Commentary

57. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He is a powerful driving force in moving the school forward. He is well supported by his senior and middle managers. There is a strong commitment to raising standards as well as the achievement and self-esteem of students. The school works hard to ensure that there is equality of opportunity. To this end, there are clear priorities for improvement and the school improvement plan gives detailed information on how, and when, the priorities are to be addressed. The school

has worked hard to introduce a more collaborative approach to leadership and management. This has included the use of external consultants to provide training to further enhance leadership skills. The school has also given more responsibility to curriculum managers and leaders. The headteacher and governors see them as crucial in the overall drive to raise standards higher in terms of both academic success and personal development. They are now involved more effectively in the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning. This, in part, is the reason for the good leadership of the curriculum and learning managers. Leadership is good in all areas. It is very good in science, physical education and special educational needs and excellent in art and design.

58. The school has used its Arts College status to provide effective support for other schools and for the community. The additional funding has improved the overall accommodation, appearance and working atmosphere of the school. Resources have also been used to create greater opportunities for cross-subject collaboration within the school and to help students to develop skills in different contexts. The leadership of this area is very good, ensuring that initiatives are investigated, developed and carried through, bringing extra money, resources and prestige to the school.
59. The learning support co-ordinator provides very good leadership and good management for the special educational needs faculty. Together with the behaviour support manager, he has created a strong supportive ethos which has enabled vulnerable students to access mainstream classes where, with the support of their teachers and skilful teaching assistants, they achieve as well as their peers. He has developed a strong staff team that provides very good in-class support in all subjects and shares a commitment to including all. Teaching staff receive good advice from the faculty in an information booklet which outlines characteristics of particular learning difficulties and possible teaching strategies. All reviews are well organised and thorough and involve parents and students. There are good recording and reporting systems, but these have not yet improved practice in all curriculum areas.
60. The governance of the school is good. The governors are loyal to and positive about the school, and have developed their role as effective critical friends. They are very effective in their financial oversight of the school. They have a very good understanding of the principles and practice of best value and use them fully to underpin their work. They are well supported and guided by a highly effective and efficient bursar. Budget decisions are made prudently after careful consideration and systemic evaluation of the impact of spending decisions. Governors have also worked hard to improve communications with parents. They have a good training programme to ensure that they are aware of new developments. Although the school had well planned and good assemblies during the week, it still does not comply with its statutory duties to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students. This was an issue at the time of the previous inspection.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,563,199
Total expenditure	3,512,920
Expenditure per student	3,934

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	31,228
Balance carried forward to the next	75,426

61. Management of the school is good. It functions effectively on a day-to-day basis as a calm and orderly community. Communications are good, particularly with parents. The school has devised a very good self-evaluation programme which includes a rolling programme of reviews of subjects. These reviews are supported, when appropriate, by external consultants. The outcomes are used to identify priorities and developments for the school improvement plan. Management by curriculum managers and co-ordinators is good and they support their colleagues very well. However, they do not always evaluate lessons or monitor students' work effectively to identify, share and embed good practice. As a consequence, there are inconsistencies in the school's approach to aspects of teaching and learning and much of the very good practice in the school is not fully developed across and between subject areas. For example, whilst levels of literacy are satisfactory overall, there is no clear, coherent approach to improving literacy skills across the school and significant variations in the way in which teachers in different subject areas attempt to do so. Schemes of work and lesson planning are generally good.
62. The leadership of the work related learning (WRL) programme is effective. Elements of the programme are well co-ordinated and a clear vision and direction are informing its improvement. There is currently a focus on establishing more courses for a wider variety of students of different levels of attainment, investing in ICT to reinforce administrative, auditing and monitoring systems and improving facilities for vocational groups. The programmes and opportunities provided are already having a positive impact on the attendance, attitudes and achievements of certain individuals and groups of students.
63. The school collects and analyses much useful data but does not always make best use of it to bring about improvement. Some curriculum managers, for example, are not always aware of the significance of the data or how to use it as a means of analysing and tracking progress. In some areas data is not used to set individual programmes to help students to improve. In some areas, the use of non-specialist staff, who may have responsibilities in other areas, makes it difficult for curriculum managers to monitor their work or to find time to meet formally to review progress and plan for the future. This is particularly true in religious education, history and ICT.
64. The arrangements for the continuing professional development of staff and performance management are good. They include teaching and non-teaching staff and are supported by appropriate training opportunities. New staff and those on initial teaching training programmes are also well supported and there are good induction programmes. The school has recently been accredited as an Investor in People.
65. In the last few years, the school has undergone significant change. There has been a large turnover of staff, in most cases due to promotion or retirement. The school now has Visual Arts College status and has reorganised its leadership and management structures. Despite these changes, it has continued to ensure that students' achievement and the quality of education are good. It gives good value for money.

Leadership and management in the sixth form

66. Leadership and management in the sixth form are both **good**. The senior leadership team and the head of sixth form provide a clear sense of purpose and direction for students and staff. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and a mutually

supportive structure exists that has functioned well in the absence of the head of the sixth form due to illness. Pastoral management is good and the monitoring of students' progress is central to the role of the tutors. The writing of university entrance applications has recently been shared, which spreads the workload. The good management of the curriculum enables a very wide range of GCE A and AS level and vocational courses to be offered. This was mentioned by a number of students as the reason for their choosing the school for their post-16 work. Two thirds of Year 11 students now stay on to the sixth form.

67. The day-to-day management and administration of the sixth form are good. The examination results are well analysed. As a result, there is a clear vision for development with a focus on improving results and maximising the achievement of individuals. Students have clear targets and there are high expectations on them to work maturely and independently. Teaching is generally monitored but needs to be evaluated more rigorously so that the ways in which students learn most effectively can be better identified.
68. The governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form and are active in their role as critical friends. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Results and standards have stayed consistently high and the school has been successful in implementing an extended vocational curriculum. The sixth form is cost effective and its finances are very well managed. There is an appropriate balance between the income and expenditure of the main school and the sixth form, which is closely monitored. The very good results mean that the sixth form provides very good value for money.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective schemes of work in Years 7, 9 and 11 ensure that lessons are well structured and support students' progress.
- Teaching and learning are underpinned by good specialist knowledge and a range of teaching and learning styles.
- Procedures for curriculum target setting do not ensure that students know what they need to do to improve.
- Policy and practice in relation to reading is not yet fully effective.

Commentary

69. Results in tests and examinations in 2003 were lower than in previous years but they improved again in 2004. The Year 9 national test results in 2003 were below the national average. Girls performed better than boys, with a difference in attainment slightly higher than the national average. GCSE results at grades A* to C for English language were below average in 2003 but there has been a small increase in 2004 in the proportion achieving higher grades. In 2003 girls again performed better than boys, but the difference was below that seen nationally. GCSE results at grades A* to C for English literature were above average and provisional results for 2004 suggest that they may be well above average. In 2003 boys performed better than girls and were well above the national average for boys. Indications are that boys have also performed strongly in 2004.
70. Current standards are above the national expectation in Years 9 and 11 and achievement is also good. In Year 9, students speak with a clear awareness of different audiences and types of speech. For example, one class prepared 'prompt cards' for persuasive language incorporating key stylistic features. Their writing is well developed across a wide range of tasks. They carefully redraft at each stage of the writing process to ensure high-quality outcomes. Written work shows a satisfactory level of reading comprehension. Year 11 coursework includes well-developed fiction and non-fiction work. Students integrate well the skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing. For example, in one class, lower-attaining students were preparing a piece of coursework on Romeo and Juliet by reading out their written responses, followed by good discussion and interpretation of points made.
71. Teaching and learning are good. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory and many were better. Teachers have good specialist knowledge which is used particularly well to support students' understanding of different texts, structures and meanings. Activities are well matched to learning objectives and students respond well. Relationships are good

and students collaborate and support each other well. Teachers use questions well, enabling students to clarify and justify their thinking. The use of ICT is widespread and has a beneficial impact on the quality of students' work, but is sometimes produced by students using their own resources. The final part of lessons is not always used sufficiently to support students' understanding of key points from the lesson.

72. The leadership of the department is good and management is satisfactory. A range of well-focused policy statements informs practice and teamwork is good. Significant steps have been taken to address issues of boys' underperformance. The curriculum manager sets a very good example of effective teaching. However, performance data are not well used to plan interventions, track progress or inform target-setting and this is not satisfactory. Marking is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, but does not always help lower-attaining students to understand what they need to do to improve. It is good in Years 10 and 11.
73. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 are now well structured, containing appropriate detail in relation to all key areas of English. Teachers plan their lessons effectively so as to ensure that they meet the needs of students at all levels of ability.

Literacy across the curriculum

74. The development of skills in literacy across other subjects is mainly satisfactory and sometimes good. For example, in physical education, the key words needed to create a visual picture of a gymnast were well taught and, in art and design, a clear focus was placed on the speaking skills necessary for effective presentation. However, not all departments have taken up the whole-school programme for literacy across the curriculum but it is supporting improvements in teaching and learning where it has been incorporated into planning.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in French, Spanish and German is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership provides a clear direction for the faculty's work; this is leading to an improvement in standards.
- Most students learn well because of the good teaching.
- The monitoring of students' work is unsatisfactory, because it is inconsistent.
- Students do not always have sufficient positive guidance on how their work may be improved.

Commentary

75. In 2003, teachers' assessments indicated that standards at the end of Year 9 were close to the national average in French and above it in German. Although more students reached the expected standard than nationally, none reached the higher levels. The most recent assessments show standards were below those of the previous year. The

performance of boys and girls in these years is broadly similar, although girls did better than boys in German.

76. The results of the GCSE examinations taken in 2003 were around the national average. A much greater proportion of students at the school follow a full GCSE modern foreign language course to the age of 16 than is now the case nationally. The performance of students entered for the Higher Level was close to the national average in both languages in 2003, but the most recent results show that, whilst they improved in French, they fell sharply in German. Boys' attainment was considerably lower than that of girls. In 2004, a small number of students were entered for a GCSE Spanish examination as a second foreign language, and all attained higher grades.
77. Staffing difficulties experienced over a lengthy period adversely affected the performance of many students across all year groups in 2004, particularly those studying German, but a more stable pattern of staffing and an improvement in the quality of teaching is now leading to a rapid rise in standards. This was confirmed by work seen during the inspection.
78. For current students in Year 9, standards are showing good rates of improvement, particularly in the development of oral and listening skills, and are now in line with national expectations. Achievement is good, notably in German, where the majority of students are able to express themselves fluently, accurately and with evident enjoyment. A group of higher attaining students worked in small groups to present a series of amusing, off-the-cuff role-plays which drew on recent experience and demonstrated secure knowledge of the perfect tense, word order and pronouns. A parallel group of lower attainers, studying the same grammatical concept, also impressed by their ability to concentrate and focus on points of grammar. They were able to respond to questions readily and accurately, to recall vocabulary and to sustain a dialogue in German with their teacher throughout the whole lesson. Standards in French are not as high; students are less confident speakers and often seem unsure of essential language structures. For example they frequently show an incomplete knowledge of verb forms previously studied, of adjectival agreements and of everyday phrases.
79. By Year 11, higher-attaining students are generally consolidating their knowledge and skills well. Provision for average and lower-attaining students is now better suited to their needs than was previously the case. Work sampled suggests they are on course for improved examination success as a result. Written skills, which are the least well-developed skills for younger students, show some improvement by this stage as a result of greater exposure to longer descriptive exercises or to tasks that require personal opinion to be expressed at greater length.
80. Many students have developed very good pronunciation, intonation and fluency because they have experience of hearing the foreign language spoken consistently in class. The excellent linguistic expertise of their teachers is almost always used to great effect. In the most effective cases, quite complex grammatical points are explained with great clarity and precision in the foreign language, so that many students can follow and understand without needing explanations in English. Since most students are very willing to co-operate with their teacher, they are generally interested in tackling such challenging tasks and accept it as normal practice. On the very rare occasions when too much English is spoken by the teacher, students make noticeably less effort to understand the foreign

language and thus perpetuate a cycle of hesitancy and lack of confidence in their own capability.

81. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers' generally high expectations of work and behaviour in class ensure time is almost always used well, allowing students to focus without distraction on learning activities. The good and better teaching seen in all three languages, but most commonly in German, is characterised by very well planned lessons, lively pace and teachers' dynamism. The faculty's strong extra-curricular programme, offering visits to France, German and Spain from Year 7 onwards, attracts good support from students. Assessment needs to be developed, as current practice is inconsistent. Many students have insufficient feedback from teachers' marking to know how they can improve their work.
82. Good leadership provides clear direction and a very good role-model for teachers and students. The use of performance data to raise the performance of groups and individual students is a developing aspect of the faculty's work but students are not fully aware of their learning targets. Steps taken over recent years to incorporate up-to-date teaching strategies into revised schemes of work are leading to improvements in the classroom but these developments are not supported by a programme of classroom observations. The lack of opportunities to share and extend a wealth of good, innovative practice is hindering otherwise good management.
83. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory; only the issue of student portfolios remains to be addressed. The faculty's capacity for further improvement is now very high.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results of the GCSE examinations are above the national average.
- Teachers' high expectations and very good knowledge ensure that the subject is well taught, particularly in GCSE classes.
- Marking is carried out regularly but it does not include comments to help students improve their work.
- Monitoring of the work of the department is not effective.

Commentary

84. In the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9, students' standards, measured by their average points scores were below the national average. The figures for 2004 show some improvement, with nearly seven in ten students gaining the expected level, just below the national average for previous years. The proportion of higher-attaining students is much higher than the national average. Attainment is satisfactory overall in Year 9, and is good in Year 11. Girls' attainment has been consistent over the last five years but boys' results have declined. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, over half of the candidates gained grades A* to C which was above the national average. Provisional results for 2004 indicate an even higher proportion of A* to C grades and, apart from a small number that

were not entered for any examinations, all students in Year 11 gained a GCSE grade in mathematics. A higher proportion of boys than girls attain grades A* to C but more girls gain the highest grades. Students perform consistently better in mathematics at GCSE than they do in other subjects.

85. Students' achievement is good, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7, 8, and 9 students work productively individually but sometimes too slowly. Early work in Year 7, particularly for lower attainers, consolidates number operations and understanding of sequences. By Year 9 higher attainers have developed this into algebraic forms and are proficient in methods of representing data and they can find areas of complex shapes. Some lower-attaining students in Year 9 still have difficulty with mental arithmetic and do not have a range of strategies to help them with written calculations. In GCSE classes students make more rapid gains. At the start of Year 10 they consolidate their understanding of decimals and, by Year 11, they confidently solve quadratic and simultaneous equations.
86. Teaching is good. All lessons seen were satisfactory or better with some very good teaching in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have a good understanding of students' previous learning so they structure the lessons well in order to develop their knowledge and skills further. Very good knowledge of the subject and questioning skills allow very productive discussions with the whole class, during group work and with individual students. High expectations and an insistence on high standards provide a good learning environment. Teaching assistants provide good support not only for targeted students but more generally around the class. Few teachers declare what the learning objectives are during the lessons and so students do not always have a clear idea of what they are expected to achieve. Teachers do not always reinforce what has been learned at the end of the lesson.
87. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. Teachers show a clear desire to raise the aspirations and standards of students and the analyses of results and a clear development plan for the department support this. However the department's work is not effectively monitored so that, for example, there is inconsistency in teaching methods. Assessment is satisfactory. The marking of students' work is carried out regularly, with a grade and sometimes an encouraging comment but teachers rarely offer any comments which help students to understand how to improve their work. Students learn some ICT skills in mathematics but the technology is not used sufficiently to help improve their learning of mathematics.
88. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The quality of teaching has been maintained and the department still provides a good standard of education for its students. However, the need for more constructive comments when marking and for more effective monitoring are still issues to be addressed.

Numeracy across the curriculum

89. The quality of students' numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory. Students use their mathematical skills in a number of subjects, notably geography and design and technology. In geography, for example, students use graphs to analyse fieldwork data and, in religious education, concepts of infinity are discussed, but students' use of graphs

in science is sometimes unsatisfactory. However, these activities are generated by the curriculum in these subjects and are not part of a whole-school focus on numeracy. A draft numeracy policy has been produced but it has not yet had the impact that it should have across the school.

SCIENCE

The quality of provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership has improved assessment and the curriculum.
- Teachers' expert knowledge makes teaching informative.
- Teachers' marking gives insufficient information to students on how to improve their standards.
- Good relationships between students and teachers make lessons effective.
- The presentation of students' work and the standard of their graphs are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

90. Results of national tests for Year 9 students in 2003 were close to the average for all schools nationally and above the average for schools with a similar proportion of free school meals. However, they were very low compared with the results of schools where students shared similar prior attainment. Results have been close to the national average since 1999. In most years, there has been no difference between the performance of boys and girls but, in 2003, girls' results were significantly better than the boys'. Results in the GCSE Dual Award science examinations declined from 2001 to 2003, when they fell below the national average. The unvalidated results for 2004 show a marked improvement.
91. The standard of students' work by the end of Year 9 is around the national expectation. Students use bar charts to show variation in quantities, use ammeters and voltmeters but carry out only a small range of calculations. In Year 11, standards of students' work are above the national expectation. Students use a range of formulae, write balanced chemical equations and show knowledge of a wide range of scientific topics. Graph-drawing skills are poorly developed at all ages. A shortage of textbooks has limited opportunities in some areas.
92. Students' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Students enter school with average standards, make satisfactory progress to the end of Year 9, when they are average and improve to the end of Year 11. Because relationships are good, teachers waste little time organising students so lessons are productive. Higher-attaining students achieve very well. The proportion of the highest examination grades is above the national average.
93. Teaching and learning are both good. In Years 7 to 9, they are satisfactory, but they are good in Years 10 and 11 and very good in the sixth form. Lessons are well planned to make good use of teachers' expert knowledge. The best are brisk and include a variety of activities, which maintain students' interest and make learning effective. Students who have special educational needs progress at the same rate as the rest of their class

because teachers give them extra help. The presentation of work is sometimes unsatisfactory. Although assessment is satisfactory overall, teachers are not always sufficiently critical, their marking is sometimes not rigorous enough and their comments do not explain how students can improve their standards.

94. Leadership is very good. There is a clear drive to improve standards. The curriculum is evolving and expanding to provide opportunities for all and the assessment, recording and monitoring of students' progress have improved. Management is very good. A rigorous evaluation of the curriculum area has been carried out to aid future development. Day-to-day organisation is very good, teachers are deployed to make best use of their subject specialisms and the laboratory technicians are efficient.
95. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. While significant changes have taken place in the curriculum and accommodation, textbooks remain in short supply, teachers' marking is still unsatisfactory and there have been no improvements to the crowded preparation area.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is not enough lesson time for students in Years 7 to 8 to improve their attainment levels.
- Examination results are below the national average but improving.
- Low achievers and students with special educational needs benefit from good support from teaching assistants.
- There is not enough planned time for teachers of ICT to meet and share good practice.
- The investment in computers across the curriculum has had a positive impact on standards.

Commentary

96. Standards in Year 9 are below the national average. Although results of the GCSE examination in 2003 were below average there has been a significant improvement in 2004. The results of girls are better than those of boys at the end of Year 9 but this difference is not apparent at GCSE level. Standards in Year 11 are now in line with national expectations.
97. There were no Year 7 lessons during the inspection, but students' work indicates satisfactory progress with presentation skills and spreadsheets. The most able students in Year 8 achieve well in using software for web design. The least able students benefit from the very good support of their learning support assistant for multimedia presentations. Achievement in Year 9 is inconsistent; many students are affected by a lack of time for the subject in Years 7 and 8. Students now benefit from an extra lesson and make satisfactory progress in setting up databases.
98. Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11 because of the very good knowledge and lesson planning that the experienced specialist teachers bring to their work. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is sometimes limited owing to the teachers' varying expertise. Teachers monitor progress well and target support where it is needed. The most able students learn well from challenging activities. Average ability students, mainly boys, are too reliant

upon teachers and are easily distracted. Homework is regular and work is marked frequently, with very good written guidance for improvement.

99. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The curriculum leader has a clear vision for the development of ICT and this is starting to have a positive effect on standards. There is a good rapport amongst the ICT teachers but there is no formal time for non-specialist and inexperienced teachers to meet as a team and share good practice. History and mathematics take responsibility for teaching and assessing some of the ICT requirements and, in those subjects, there are good arrangements for ensuring that assessments are accurate. There are good arrangements for monitoring students' progress but strategies to improve the achievement of boys are not yet well developed. There are good links with feeder primary schools and this eases the transition of students to the high school. The quality of provision has improved satisfactorily since the previous inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

100. The school has made a significant investment in upgrading and renewing computers. Students have good access to computers and this supports learning in many subjects, in particular art and design and in design and technology, and encourages good presentation techniques. The ICT curriculum leader provides good guidance in the use of ICT in other subjects and contributes to the induction of new teachers to the school. However, teachers' skills are not yet developed well enough to ensure that students consistently build on the skills developed in ICT lessons. The use of interactive whiteboards is being developed. The school benefits from the good services provided by the technical support team.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision for geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above the national average.
- There is a strong and successful emphasis on fieldwork and enquiry skills in all years.
- ICT is being used to a much greater extent now than in previous years.
- The subject leader is good at developing the skills of a capable and enthusiastic team and taking action that leads to improved achievement by students.

Commentary

101. Students' standards in geography seen during the inspection are in line with national expectations by the age of 14 and above by the age of 16. This is similar to the situation at the time of the last inspection. Many start from a low baseline in Year 7. In the Year 9 teacher assessments in 2003 students reached standards that are slightly below the national average. In Year 9, most students are good at investigative and enquiry work and have plenty of experience of seeing geographical features at first hand, thanks to an extensive programme of fieldwork. Students with special educational needs receive high

quality support for their learning which enables them to make good progress. Work has begun to address the specific learning needs of gifted students but there is more to be done to increase the percentage of students reaching the very highest levels.

102. Just over a quarter of students usually chose to study geography as a GCSE option in 2003. Two-thirds of these achieved a grade A* to C result; a figure that is considerably above the national average. The great majority of students make good progress, enjoy their studies and achieve their predicted grades. There are a few students (mostly boys) who tend to be reluctant to follow instructions or to complete work to a high standard without a great deal of attention from their teachers. Some students are held back by inadequate literacy skills. Teachers take great care to ensure that students from minority ethnic groups, those who speak English as an additional language and those who find difficulty in mixing with other students, are fully included in all activities. Students benefit greatly from access to a well-equipped and well managed school library.
103. The quality of teaching is good. The majority of lessons are taught by three specialist teachers who have a high level of expertise. The remaining lessons are taught competently by non-specialists who are capable teachers but who, inevitably, have lower levels of specialist knowledge. Teachers are enthusiastic and prepare their lessons well, often using the approaches set out in the National Key Stage 3 Strategy with regard to starter and plenary sessions, the application of thinking skills and the use of writing frames. It is usual for lessons to include a range of learning activities with opportunities for individual and group work. Many lessons also include the use of visual images from video clips, overhead projector transparencies, wall displays, textbooks or the Internet. Fieldwork and investigative activities are a very strong feature of the learning opportunities provided. In most cases, students made good progress because lessons are interesting, varied and lively. Moral, ethical and cultural issues are frequently discussed. In a small number of the lessons seen, there were students in the class who were reluctant to learn but they were kept fully engaged thanks to strong insistence by the teachers. Homework tasks that extend learning are routinely set. Assessment is satisfactory, books are marked frequently and credits are given to acknowledge many aspects of achievement. Students' work is accurately assessed but students need to be given more precise guidance about what else they need to do to reach a higher level or grade.
104. The leadership and management of geography are both good. The subject leader is experienced and capable. She has accurately analysed the strengths and developmental needs of the department and has taken action to address many of the latter. Improvement has been satisfactory; most of the points identified in the previous inspection report have been decisively acted upon. However, there is still no system for systematic evaluation of teaching and learning in the subject, including lesson observations. Good use is made of the humanities ICT suite to extend and enrich learning, but digital display facilities are not available in all the geography rooms. Citizenship themes are taught well within the context of local, national and international case studies. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

History

The quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Performance of boys in 2003 GCSE examinations was significantly below the average for boys nationally.
- There is insufficient focus on potentially high attaining students, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Assessment information is not yet used consistently to help students see how they can improve.
- Schemes of work and departmental planning are having a positive impact on the quality of provision.
- Good leadership has established a clear vision and direction for the department.
- There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of new initiatives.

Commentary

105. Teachers' assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003 and 2004 were broadly in line with national averages. GCSE examination results were just below the national average in 2003. The performance of boys was, however, significantly below average. Girls outperformed boys but there were relatively few of the highest grades awarded. Students did not do as well in history than in the other subjects they studied in 2003. Provisional GCSE examination results in 2004 indicate an improvement, but girls continue to outperform boys.
106. Standards of work seen during the inspection are broadly in line with the national expectations for both 14 and 16 year olds. Most students make steady progress in Years 7, 8 and 9 and achieve satisfactorily. Year 9 students can gather and interpret information (for example relating to slavery conditions in the Americas). Most can write well-developed answers but not all students include enough detail to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding effectively on paper. Students in Years 10 and 11 generally make good progress and achieve well. They can investigate, gather and evaluate sources. They use the outcomes to put together reasoned explanations for significant events and changes. Lower-attaining students are well supported in lessons and achieve well. Some potentially higher-attaining students do not achieve high enough results. The attitudes to learning displayed by some boys in a number of groups observed impeded their progress and achievement. Some sixth-form lessons were sampled where achievement and attainment were both good.
107. Extensive schemes of work and detailed departmental planning are having a positive impact on the quality of provision and the contribution the subject makes to the promotion of citizenship. Specialist and non-specialist staff introduce lessons well, clarify what is expected of students and employ a range of teaching strategies and styles. These contribute to students' gains in knowledge and understanding and produce positive responses to the topics studied. Relationships with students are good. Students generally work well and co-operatively. In Years 10 and 11, good group work enabled students to develop understanding and form good conclusions about why people came to Britain after 1945 and about changes in medical understanding during the Renaissance. In a lesson combining Year 8 and 9 students, the planning ensured that lower-attaining students were well supported. In some lessons, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9, a lack of appropriately challenging tasks for higher-attaining students prevents them from progressing further. Though teachers increasingly use appropriate methods to improve

students' literacy, there is still not enough attention paid to improving the performance of boys or adapting to the requirements of different GCSE examination boards. Learning is enhanced by effective displays and a growing range of organised visits and networks. ICT is increasingly incorporated into the work of the department to stimulate enquiry and improve presentation.

108. The department is increasingly using assessment information to set targets for students and to monitor their progress. However it is not yet used well or consistently enough to help students see how they can improve. Assessment by students of each other contributes to good teaching, learning and achievement observed in the sixth form.
109. The subject is well led. The curriculum manager has established a clear vision and direction for the department. This is reflected in improvement plans that are appropriately focused on raising standards but there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of new initiatives.
110. There has been significant progress in improving aspects of the provision, which was identified as weak in the last inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The achievement of students in Years 10 and 11 is good.
- Monitoring of the department is unsatisfactory, particularly the observation of lessons, the moderating of students' work and the quality of marking across the department.
- The department makes a significant contribution to students' personal development and to the study of citizenship.
- There is insufficient challenge for higher attaining students in Years 7 – 9.
- There are very good schemes of work and clear priorities for further improvement.

Commentary

111. In Year 9 standards are at the expected levels, as set out in the locally agreed syllabus. Overall achievement by the end of Year 9, including of those with special educational needs and the few for whom English is not their home language, is satisfactory. In Year 7, all students make good progress and achieve well. This is the result of carefully planned and focused teaching which both interests and challenges students. Progress in Years 8 and 9 is satisfactory although the focus on covering a range of different religious beliefs means students have a lot of content to understand. The range of work is not always sufficiently challenging, particularly for the more able. In Year 11, standards are around the levels expected nationally. Work is challenging for all students and appropriate to their needs. The unconfirmed results for the short course GCSE in 2004 were around national expectations. The school's data shows that students performed better in religious education than the average for their other subjects. This represents good achievement.

112. Teaching is satisfactory with some key strengths. Lesson planning is very thorough and ensures that there is a very clear structure for learning. Resources, particularly visual material, are well chosen to engage and motivate students. Although many staff are non-specialists, they have a sound knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject. Considerable effort is made to create a calm yet purposeful working atmosphere in which students can learn. In one lesson this was achieved by the effective use of music; in another through interesting and motivating starter activities. Some of the work, however, is not sufficiently matched to students' needs. In some lessons there is a lack of challenge for high attainers and work is not sufficiently tailored to the needs of lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs. These students often leave work unfinished as a result. This makes it hard for them to complete subsequent work and makes it difficult for them to revise for assessment tasks. Marking does not sufficiently help students identify their strengths and weaknesses. The subject makes a good contribution to the personal development of students. They have the opportunity to reflect on social, moral and ethical issues, as well as learning tolerance and appreciation of other faiths.
113. Leadership is good. The curriculum manager is highly motivated and supportive towards her colleagues. She is responsive to new ideas if they benefit the learning of students. For example, she is currently working with the art and design department to produce a unit of work for Year 8, looking at art and images in religion. She has produced informative schemes and guidelines to support her non-specialist colleagues. These include opportunities for developing ICT skills as well as units on citizenship. Assessment is satisfactory. The department has introduced new assessment procedures to track and monitor students' progress. Management is satisfactory. It is not yet good because monitoring of the subject is unsatisfactory. This is particularly true in relation to observation of lessons and scrutiny of students' work. It is difficult for department members to find time for meeting and sharing ideas. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. All students follow a religious education course, there are revised and improved schemes of work and numbers now opting for courses in the sixth form have increased significantly.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology (DT) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is good, particularly of those students following the GCSE courses in DT: Resistant Materials and DT: Graphic Products.
- The standard of teaching is good and there is some very good practice.
- The leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 are inaccurate.
- The developing opportunities provided for students to use computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) are good.

Commentary

114. Standards on entry in Year 7 are below the national average. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 judged that standards were below the national average in 2003, but a review of the work submitted indicates that standards were in fact in line with expectations, and that achievement is good. The higher-attaining students can express their ideas through high quality annotated sketches and are perceptive when testing and investigating familiar products. For example, when students begin to develop their knowledge and understanding of food products, they are able to identify the more healthy options for cook/chill pasta based dishes. Achievement in resistant materials and textiles is also good. The progress made by lower-attaining students is good because of the well-targeted support they receive from dedicated teaching assistants. The girls do better than the boys, as they do nationally.
115. Standards are above expectations and achievement is good in Years 10 and 11. Standards attained in the range of GCSE courses offered in 2003 were below the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that standards are now just above the national expectation and improving, as indicated in the 2004 results. There are some high quality pieces of students' coursework, for example, in graphics, where architectural models are made to exacting standards, and in resistant materials, where students designed seating for young children. In 2004 GCSE examinations students generally performed better in resistant materials than they did in their other subjects.
116. The quality of teaching is good and many lessons are very good. In the most effective lessons, teachers' preparation and classroom management are very good. Teachers are enthusiasts. They use their very good knowledge of the subject effectively to motivate their students. They use skilful, well-targeted question and answer sessions, keeping the pace of the lesson brisk, with no time wasted. Students' learning is supported well with high-quality workbooks and structured design folios. Students receive constructive comment on their work from teachers and therefore understand what they need to do to improve.
117. Leadership and management are good. The curriculum manager has developed a mutually supportive team approach, which contributes well to the department's successful development. She is well aware of areas in need of improvement and has established systems to raise students' attainment further. Assessment is good in GCSE courses, but is only satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9, and teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 are not accurate. The department continues to build on its strengths and steadily improves. For example, it now offers a GCSE course in manufacturing, which is better suited to some students' needs because it provides many visits and links to local manufacturers. There has been good progress made since the last inspection. New CAM equipment has been recently purchased which will further improve provision for CAD/CAM. A committed technician team provide support that has a positive impact on standards.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Provision for art and design is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Teachers motivate and inspire students to work creatively.
- There are very high standards of work and very high levels of achievement.

- The percentage of students studying art and design in Years 10 to 13 is high and well above the national average.
- A very positive ethos in the department encourages success and achievement.

Commentary

118. At the age of 14 years, students have attained standards that are above those expected nationally. In 2003, the percentage of students aged 16 attaining the higher grades in their GCSE examinations was high and well above the national average. The percentage of students who attained the A* or A grades was very high and also well above the national average. This has been a regular feature over a significant number of years. Art and design is a very popular subject and the numbers of students studying art in Years 10 and 11 is high and well above the national average. Girls attained higher standards than boys.
119. Students in Years 7, 8, and 9 make very good progress and achieve very well. They are learning to use their sketchbooks as visual diaries to record ideas, techniques, experiments and concepts, very often inspired by the work of other artists. They learn, explore and experiment with many different materials and media. Consequently, at the start of Year 10, they have become confident artists who are willing to take risks with ideas and who can use their increasing knowledge and understanding creatively and imaginatively. They use sketchbooks well. Drawing skills are very well developed and form a very good basis at the start of Year 10. This increasing knowledge of mark making in a variety of forms is a very good foundation for studies post 16. Students in Years 10 and 11 have access to a rich diet of both two and three-dimensional art, including painting, printmaking, sculpting and modelling in a variety of media, textile and jewellery design, glass, digital imagery and photography. Their achievement is excellent through their GCSE course.
120. Critical studies using the examples of other artists, both western and of other cultures, are central to students' work. The artists chosen often include contemporary artists and designers, and artists in residence. These studies make a very significant contribution to raising standards and improving achievement.
121. The quality of teaching ranges from good to excellent and is overall very good. Teachers work very hard planning and preparing to ensure that introductions to lessons inform and inspire. Teachers have a very high expectation that students can achieve and be successful in art. This is well met in practice. The well-structured introductions at the start of lessons always link with previous learning and are significantly enhanced by the expertise of the teacher. Teachers' high level of knowledge and expertise are significant factors in the very high standards that students attain.
122. Students are inspired and motivated to work and excited by the prospect of creating their own artwork. Continuous assessment of progress and guidance on how to improve their studies maintain interest and concentration throughout the lesson. All lessons conclude with the opportunity to share work, to recognise achievement and to make connections with the work to follow. Year 9 students have developed a very good attitude to art and an awareness of the opportunities for creative work in this subject. As a result, students in Years 10 and 11 show an increasing level of maturity and serious commitment. Students' work is displayed and celebrated, alongside that of professional artists, in the school

galleries, the library, corridors, stairwells, entrances and play areas, studios and meeting rooms. The quality of this work is stunning. Assessment is very good. Students' progress is tracked from Year 7 to Year 11 and targets are set for improvement. In Years 10 and 11, predicted grades are based upon Year 9 test scores in the core subjects. There is inevitably some difference between predictions and actual performance. However, as students move through their GCSE courses, most are able to improve their predicted grade.

123. Leadership and management of art and design are excellent. The acquisition of Arts College status is a testament to the vision and leadership of the department. Specialist status has improved provision and resources significantly. It has enabled significant links to be made with partner schools, business and industry, arts agencies, and further and higher educational institutions, as well as within the community and, more recently, within the school. These are well used to share good practice and to seek additional resources. The appointment of a team of specialist art and design teachers, artists in residence and post-graduate students has been managed very well. They have been enabled to work to their considerable strengths and to use their high levels of expertise as teachers and artists to raise levels of attainment and achievement. The leadership and direction of the Arts College are very dependent on the influence and enthusiasm of its manager.
124. In the last inspection, the use of information and communication technology in art and design was an area for improvement. The subsequent provision of a studio devoted to the use of information and communication technology for creating digital imagery and providing Internet access has ensured that this issue has been very successfully addressed. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

Example of outstanding practice
The school was awarded specialist college status in the visual arts. This has been the catalyst for raising standards and achievement significantly.
Arts College status has enhanced provision and resources significantly. It has facilitated significant links to be made across the curriculum and outside the school. These have included partner schools, business and industry, arts agencies, galleries and other places of cultural interest, further and higher educational institutions, the local community and more recently within the school in order to share good practice.
The department brings in artists in residence and uses PGCE students working on their school placements as practising artists. It has enabled all staff to work to their considerable strengths and to use their high level of expertise as teachers and artists. As a consequence this has had a very significant impact upon the teaching and learning and ultimately upon the very high standards and high levels of achievement that students attain. It has an extensive impact on the school generally.

Music

Provision for music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' specialist knowledge and determination to relaunch the department are driving up standards.
- High quality self-review processes have informed departmental improvement planning.

- New schemes of work are helping to raise standards.
- GCSE examination results in 2004 are below national expectations.
- Accommodation in one music room is inadequate. It has a detrimental effect on what students can undertake and achieve.
- The introduction of ICT into the department is enriching the curriculum and raising standards.

Commentary

125. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 judged standards to be below national expectations, but an analysis of work being done in the present Year 9 indicates that standards are satisfactory. The GCSE group in 2004 numbered 16, of whom 44 per cent achieved grades A* to C. This is a low proportion, but standards in Year 11 are at present in line with national expectations. Overall achievement is satisfactory.
126. The previous low standards are no longer evident in classroom practice in any year. The music department is now fully staffed with well-qualified teachers who are determined to raise standards and lift the profile of the department throughout the school and in the community.
127. Students in Years 7 and 8 can now play instruments in class with increasing confidence and technical proficiency. They listen to the sounds that each other make and most contribute successfully to performances in small groups and with the whole class. In Year 7, students already understand that the 'elements' of music are important and must be included in their compositions. They improvise, some with flair, and are all developing an understanding of how compositions are devised. Throughout Years 7, 8, and 9, students become increasingly confident in the use of computer software used for improvisation and composition. In one Year 8 class, students used computers to compose a theme and variation. They soon understood at first hand how compositions are created and recorded successfully. These opportunities contribute positively to students' capability in ICT. The majority of students make at least satisfactory progress, but the potentially most able, musically, are not identified at an early stage or challenged appropriately.
128. Students opting to study music in Years 10 and 11 are growing in number, with 50 per cent more in Year 10 than in Year 11. Standards are rising and students now understand what is expected of them if they are to achieve higher grades. They are able to listen attentively to recorded extracts of popular songs from the 1960's and then compose their own music in the appropriate style. Another group used computer software and keyboards to create a sound track for an extract from a silent movie. The early results were most promising and students were keen to return for the next stages of the task in the next lesson.
129. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They are frequently good and sometimes very good. The best lessons engage students from the start. Students know exactly what is expected of them and how much time they have to complete tasks. Teachers demonstrate what students have to do and this modelling serves to raise standards. Lessons are like workshop sessions. Students support each other in realising their musical objectives and are increasingly proficient in assessing each other's work in progress. Whole-class lessons taught in one room are limited by the space available and progress is being hindered.

130. Relationships between students and teachers are very good and most students are encouraged to stick to the task, however challenging, for as long as is required. Teachers' musical skills inspire students in all aspects of their work.
131. The leadership of the department is good. Vision is clear and focused on raising standards and extending the range of opportunities for students. Schemes of work are now in place and assessment practice is emerging positively, having an impact on the quality of work that students achieve.
132. Day-to-day management of the department is good and visiting instrumental teachers speak positively of the support that they receive. Students are not yet sufficiently involved in setting their own targets for learning. This is recognised as being a current priority. Extra-curricular opportunities provided by the recreational and performing arts faculty are growing. Early rehearsals for the forthcoming school production are imaginative and creative. Performance opportunities throughout the year make a good contribution to students' moral, social and cultural development.
133. To bring the music department to its current position, staff have worked decisively towards their identified goals. Improvement has been good since the last inspection.

Drama

134. Drama was sampled and therefore it is not possible to make a judgement about provision. Standards within the drama department are above the national expectation. In 2003 all students who took GCSE Drama achieved grades A* to C and, in 2004, the indications are that 80 per cent of students from a larger entry have achieved these grades. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use their specialist knowledge well to plan and teach stimulating lessons which engage students at all levels of attainment. In one lesson with a number of students with special educational needs, the teacher worked closely with the learning support assistant to ensure that the students could participate in group work effectively.
135. The quality of teachers' planning is good and their assessments are well informed by close knowledge of what is required to achieve each level of attainment. There are very effective procedures for involving students in target-setting through the use of drama diaries. The department organises a substantial programme of extra-curricular activities including drama productions and visits to the theatre. There is very good leadership and a recently appointed newly qualified teacher receives good support. The thorough planning provides significant potential for further development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good and sometimes outstanding teaching is raising standards and ensuring students achieve well in lessons.
- The very good attitudes and behaviour of students support their learning.
- Very good leadership and management have had a significant impact on raising levels of attainment.
- Procedures for assessment and target-setting are very good and help students know what they can do and how to improve.
- Time for the core curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is inadequate, limiting opportunities for imaginative curricular development and flexibility.
- The many clubs and school teams ensure all students have opportunity to develop their skills and talents.
- Deficiencies in accommodation hinder attainment and progress in aspects of outdoor games.

Commentary

136. The majority of Year 9 students are attaining the levels expected nationally. In the 2003 teachers' assessments, 90 per cent of Year 9 students reached the expected level, well above the national average of 74 per cent, with girls and boys attaining equally well. Boys gained equally good assessments in 2004; the slight deterioration in girls' standards was the result of long-term staff absence. When students enter the school, assessments undertaken by the department indicate they have below average levels of attainment in physical education and the Year 9 results represent good achievement. In work seen in Years 7 to 9, teachers' focus on high-quality performance and their use of effective questioning techniques to help students develop their ability to observe, evaluate and improve their own and others' work, are resulting in good achievement for boys and girls at all levels of attainment. In a Year 7 gymnastics lesson, for example, students could apply their understanding of the technical requirements of a variety of rolls and how to obtain good body tension, to produce high quality work in their own performance and that of their partner.
137. The GCSE results for 2004 show a significant improvement on the 2003 results, with 56 per cent of students achieving A* to C grades. This is close to the 2003 average for similar schools. In both years, all candidates gained at least a pass grade and the majority of the students achieved as well as and often better than expected. Students following the GCSE course often do better in physical education than they do in their other subjects, particularly the boys. In Years 10 and 11, students are performing at the levels expected at this stage and a significant number are exceeding them, particularly in their practical work. In Year 11, higher-attaining GCSE students effectively demonstrated a complex basketball drill to the rest of their class, showing a high level of skill, agility, precision, and confidence in their presentation. Later in the lesson, they ably transferred these skills as they played a game resulting in high-quality, analytical play. Achievement is good. This is due to the high expectations of the teachers and their ability to motivate students to learn.
138. A wide range of inter-form and extra-curricular sport provides good opportunities for all students, particularly the gifted and talented, to flourish in their chosen sports. Successful links with the community and with local sports clubs extend students' standards of attainment, both in school and beyond. For example, last year a total of 49 students gained representative honours at district, county, regional or national levels in a variety of sports.

139. Teaching and learning are very good. Students learn well as a result of effective teaching. Teachers' secure knowledge and very good relationships ensure that students acquire new skills with good techniques and make good progress. Lessons have clear objectives and structured progressions, with different tasks for groups within the class, where appropriate, to ensure that students of different levels of attainment are appropriately challenged. In a Year 7 football lesson, an experienced teaching assistant worked effectively with a small group of lower-attaining students on a simplified version of a task being undertaken by other members of the class with the teacher. This ensured that all the students were appropriately challenged, with individual support for those needing extra help.
140. Learning is improved by the very positive attitudes of most students, and teachers are particularly skilful in defusing potential behavioural problems at an early stage. They make good use of opportunities to promote positive social and moral messages through physical education and are particularly effective in developing the concepts of sportsmanship and teamwork. Very effective assessment, target-setting and monitoring systems ensure the learning needs of individuals and groups are addressed. This is demonstrated in lessons by effective feedback to students and supportive interventions to help them improve their work. Some teaching is inspirational in its effect on students' learning, increasing their desire to succeed. In a Year 10 GCSE lesson about the blood circulatory system, with no highly technical resources available, the teacher successfully used a wide range of teaching strategies to motivate the class to learn and understand a considerable amount of technical information at a highly challenging pace.
141. The statutory requirements of the National Curriculum are met and very good, progressive schemes of work ensure the curriculum is taught effectively. However, students in Years 10 and 11 who are not following a GCSE course have insufficient time programmed for them to follow advanced units of work of their choice, together with a broader enrichment programme. For the same reason, there is no scope to introduce the newer award-bearing courses into the curriculum, such as the Junior Sports Leadership Award or an associated range of junior sports organiser courses in specific sports.
142. Leadership and management are both very good. The curriculum manager has expertly guided developmental change when needed. He has excellent leadership qualities and a clear vision for future developments. A combination of formal and informal procedures are used to evaluate the quality of the department's work and teachers share a strong collective will to succeed and improve standards. Clear documentation provides comprehensive policies to assist the smooth running of the department.
143. Improvement has been very good since the last inspection, except for the accommodation. As in the previous inspection, the poor quality of the hard-court areas and hazardous surround fencing are limiting opportunities in a range of outdoor games, particularly tennis.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Vocational education

Provision in leisure and tourism is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Enthusiastic teaching improves learning.
- Achievement is good because of students' positive attitudes.
- The use of ICT to present work and visits to local tourist organisations motivate students well.
- There is very good support from learning support assistants so that lower-ability students achieve well.

Commentary

144. In the work seen, standards are below the national expectation. This reflects the levels of ability of the students on entry to the course. The focus for the inspection was on the Applied GCSE in leisure and tourism examination course. Students on this new course have not yet taken any examinations.
145. Students make good progress because they are motivated and enjoy their lessons. They use ICT well for research and to improve the presentation of their work. Year 11 students make good progress in understanding the need for good customer care in the tourism industry.
146. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The enthusiastic teaching and very good support of the learning support assistants encourage learning, especially for the least able students and those with special educational needs. Not enough extra challenge is provided for the higher-attaining students. Students make good use of the Internet to research local tourist facilities but, because information is copied rather than summarised, their learning is not always properly reinforced. A small number of lessons lack structure, variety and pace. Students learn well at first-hand from the planned visits to different leisure and tourism organisations.
147. Leadership is very good and management is satisfactory. The curriculum leader engenders enthusiasm amongst the teaching staff and the students. Arrangements for tracking students' progress are good. There are no specially devised schemes of work, and the teaching and learning resources have not been tailored to meet the specific day-to-day needs of the students and teachers, but the good informal communication between teachers ensures satisfactory progression between shared lessons.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision for citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is good. There is a clear vision for the subject and there are effective strategies to make it relevant to the needs of the students.
- The subject makes a good contribution to students' personal development.
- Schemes of work are well structured and backed by appropriate resources.
- There is no systematic assessment or recording of students' attainment.
- Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.
- The arrangements for teaching units of the citizenship programme through geography, history and religious education work well.

Commentary

148. Standards are in line with national expectations. Year 9 students have a good knowledge and understanding of the way the country is run at national and local levels. Year 11 students understand the key elements of what it means to be a good citizen, both within the school community and in society at large. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Despite variable levels of literacy, the majority of students are able to involve themselves in discussions on issues such as fair trade, local community needs and moral responsibility. Their written skills are less well developed; they undertake only a limited amount of work through which they investigate, research and reflect on issues. Good use is made of local business and community groups to enrich students' experiences. Visitors have included individual speakers, for example, the local MP. Visits out of school and 'focus' days are also arranged. For example, a Year 9 Citizenship Day was organised when local experts came in to explain how society works. There are also talks from visitors about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. All of these serve to motivate and stimulate students as well as improve their understanding of their rights and responsibilities.
149. Only a limited amount of teaching was seen and much of the evidence comes from an examination of students' work. On this evidence, teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is, however, variability in the quality and depth of work produced. Some reflects the outcomes of careful discussion and debate; other work indicates an over-dependency on worksheets. There is a good range of opportunities for students to become actively involved in the life of the school and with the local community. Students speak highly of the range of activities. The school council works well and enables the students to be involved closely in the school decisions.
150. Leadership of the subject is good and management is satisfactory. The co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development of citizenship education. She effectively co-ordinates the work of subject specialists in history, geography and religious education, as well as the work of group tutors on the personal, health, social and citizenship education programme. She provides very good support and advice to colleagues. She meets year learning managers and tutors as well as seeking the views of students. As yet, however, this monitoring does not include classroom observation or scrutiny of students' work. This is recognised by the co-ordinator as an area for development. Assessment of students' progress and attainment is also unsatisfactory although there are plans to address this. The subject was not inspected at the time of the previous inspection. However, in the last two years, the provision has improved and it is now good. Resources and planning have improved and citizenship is recognised as being an important aspect for all subjects to develop.

Work-related learning

The provision in work related learning is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The current provision is coherent, effective and meets statutory requirements; it is well placed for continuing development.

- The leadership of the programme is effective and elements within it are well co-ordinated.
- There is already evidence of the positive impact of programmes on individual and identified groups of pupils within the school.

Commentary

151. The school has successfully built on existing practice in relation to the provision and development of careers education, work experience, education-business links and vocationally related courses. The current provision is coherent, effective and meets statutory requirements. The school is well placed for continuing developments in this area of its work.
152. The provision is appropriately and securely founded on the nine elements identified in the framework for work related learning produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). It ensures a coherent programme for all pupils in Years 10 and 11 whilst allowing for some additional work-based experiences, vocational college courses and mentoring as appropriate to the specific needs and aspirations of identified students. Through aspects of the programme students are given knowledge, understanding and experience of work. They also develop their awareness of employment opportunities and skills relevant to enterprise and employment.
153. The leadership of the programme is effective and elements within it are well co-ordinated. A clear vision and direction for work related learning is informing improvement plans. There is currently a focus on establishing more courses for a wider variety of students of different abilities, investing in ICT to reinforce administrative, auditing and monitoring systems and improving facilities for vocational groups. There is already evidence of the positive impact of programmes and opportunities provided on the attendance, attitudes and achievements of certain individuals and groups of pupils within the school.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 12 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.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses 2003

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	18	100	80.1	77.8	23.7	51.7	29.9
Biology	19	100	65.2	52.6	11.1	43.2	20.6
Business studies	12	100	76.4	25	16.3	36.7	26.2
Chemistry	11	90.9	72.7	27.3	13.9	35.5	24.1
Drama	10	100	86.5	70	19.6	49	30.6
English language	8	100	82.9	50	17.5	45	28.7
English literature	10	100	85.9	40	19.1	45	30.2
French	2	100	78.2	50	18.9	45	27.6
Design and technology	6	100	74.9	33.3	15.1	40	25.3
General studies	57	100	73.9	17.5	17.8	41.7	25.7
History	28	96.4	80.7	39.3	19.5	40	28.6
Information and communication technology	7	85.7	67	28.6	10.9	31.4	21.4
Mathematics, inc. Further maths	25	86.4	61.9	52	17.1	42.4	22.1
Other social sciences	16	100	71.4	43.8	15.8	41.25	24.3
Other social studies	44	95.5	69.7	29.5	16.7	35.9	24.1
Physics	6	100	68.6	66.7	14.4	32	22.7
Religious studies	5	100	80.2	60	22.6	44	29.8
Spanish	6	100	na	33.3	na	36.7	na

Level 3 GCE A level courses 2003

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	17	100	98.6	76.5	50.2	102.4	87.5
Biology	14	100	96.4	35.7	39.2	84.3	78.6
Business studies	9	100	98.7	22.2	36.8	75.6	80.1
Chemistry	7	100	97.6	28.6	49	77.1	84.9
Drama	8	100	99.5	62.5	40.1	95	83.6

Design and technology	4	100	74.9	25	15.1	75	25.3
English language	6	100	99.4	50	36.3	86.7	80.9
English literature	9	100	99.5	33.3	46.5	84.4	86.5
French	1	100	98.8	100	51.5	100	87.6
Geography	12	100	98.7	25	44.5	80	84
General studies	55	100	94.7	18.2	31	66.9	73.1
History	22	100	99	22.7	44.6	80	84.6
Mathematics	13	92.3	96.7	53.8	55.6	89.2	88.8
Other social studies	23	100	97.4	26.1	42.7	69.6	81.8
Physics	3	100	96.7	100	44.6	113.3	81.7
Religious Education	4	100	98.8	75	46.7	100	85.6
Spanish	4	100	98.3	25	50.2	75	86.9
Sports studies	11	100	98	27.3	30.9	78.2	75.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English language and literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers have good specialist knowledge.
- Work is thoroughly assessed so that students receive guidance on how to improve.
- Teachers use an effective range of teaching styles to engage all students.
- Teachers give good support to improve students' writing.

Commentary

154. In 2003, the performance of students in GCE A-level English language examinations was above the national average. All six students gained a grade between A and E, including two at A and B. In 2004, all 11 students gained a grade between A and E, with six achieving A or B grades. In 2003, the performance of students in GCE A-level English literature was in line with the national average. All nine students gained a grade between A and E, including three at A or B. Indications are that, in 2004, all three students have gained a grade A to C. Standards are above the national expectation, and achievement is good. These results are the outcome of inclusive teaching which engages and supports all students.

155. Teaching and learning are good in both subjects. Teachers have good specialist knowledge and ensure that unfamiliar ideas and concepts are made accessible to all. A good balance is achieved between direct teaching and independent learning. In an English literature lesson students working on Chaucer's 'The General Prologue' presented independent research each had undertaken on a particular pilgrim with the teacher extending their understanding effectively. In an English language lesson students

learning about language acquisition effectively delivered a lesson to the teacher (in the role of a child) based on prior direct teaching and research materials.

156. English language and literature teachers focus clearly on the importance of students adopting an appropriate written style for the intended audience. This has a clear impact on the improvements students make to their written work. Students are engaged and responsive because teachers plan engaging and stimulating lessons. Assessment is good and marking is thorough; assessment objectives and grade criteria are used well to guide students. The curriculum manager leads the subject well.

Language and literacy skills across the curriculum

157. Students' language and literacy skills are good and are used well in other subjects. They express themselves fluently and thoughtfully in speech and write well to communicate information, ideas and opinions. Their active and critical reading enables them to become discriminating and effective independent learners.

FRENCH

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above the national expectation, and high grades are attained at A-level.
- Teaching and learning are good and challenging and students are very well motivated and diligent.
- Students successfully extend and refine their skills during the course, particularly the ability to construct essays and develop arguments in French.
- Written work sometimes contains elementary errors because the checking of work by students is not careful enough.
- A carefully planned 'bridging' course supports the transition from GCSE to A-level work.

Commentary

158. Standards are above the national expectation. Only a small number of students (mainly girls) choose to study French in the sixth form. Most have obtained good grades in their GCSE studies and they are guided carefully towards a final goal of GCE AS or A-level. In the past two years, every student entered for an examination in modern foreign languages has attained grade E or above. At A-level, both entries in French in 2003 resulted in the award of the highest grades, well above national averages. The most recent results also indicate high attainment, with two of the three candidates in French obtaining grades A or B.
159. Standards of work seen during the inspection reflect a similar pattern of attainment which is above national expectations. French is the working language of the classroom and, only five weeks into their course, Year 12 students are already beginning to adapt familiar linguistic structures to new contexts and enrich their work with a wider range of vocabulary. A discussion on relationships with family and friends showed students' willingness to present personal views at a more sustained level than is required at GCSE

level. In general, their contributions were expressed accurately and coherently, although somewhat hesitantly when dealing with new ideas.

160. Written work is being suitably developed through study of authentic reading materials, close analysis of text and exchange of ideas in class. Students have a secure knowledge of several tenses, use pronouns accurately and demonstrate an emerging fluidity of expression, including idiomatic phrases and a good range of connectives. Confidence is building for most students, who find the carefully structured 'bridging course' from GCSE supportive in helping them cope with the demands of advanced study.
161. With a further year's experience, Year 13 students are able to present arguments fluently in spoken and written form. Current standards are well on target for successful completion of the course. A class discussion on traffic problems in Chester, supported by appropriate written material, provided a genuinely even exchange of views between teacher and students. Later on, in one-to-one conversation, a student was able to speak (without preparation) thoughtfully and mainly accurately in French about a work of literature being studied.
162. Written work shows evidence of extended personal reading, sound preparation of homework exercises (including regular use of dictionaries) and a widening store of vocabulary, but also indicates that students do not pay enough attention to checking their work. A number of errors in some of the more basic elements of language, such as adjectival agreements and verb endings, detract from otherwise good standards of written work.
163. Good teaching in both years combines skilful use of French to probe or challenge students' views in a good humoured way with explicit explanation and coaching in grammar and supportive guidance materials to aid revision. Difficulties in a translation exercise in the Year 13 lesson were overcome by encouraging the students to discuss options together in French rather than remain focused on English words and idioms.
164. Teachers' assessment is good, marking in students' files is helpful and specific and the advice given is constructive. Access to a good range of authentic reading and taped materials and to opportunities for individual discussion with the foreign language assistant supplement the good provision made for students' success on the course. The students themselves contribute by their diligence and high levels of motivation.
165. Leadership is good and management satisfactory; the subject has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards on A and AS level courses are well above national expectations.
- Teachers' knowledge of the subject and of teaching methods is very good.
- Students apply themselves well to the demands of the courses and their achievement is very high.

Commentary

166. Standards are well above the national expectation. For several years, the percentage of candidates gaining the highest grades at A-level has been at or above the national average. Students perform consistently better in mathematics at A-level than they do in other subjects. Boys are particularly successful, attaining well above the national average. In 2003, four out of five boys and three out of eight girls achieved the highest grades. At AS level, over half the candidates attained grades A or B compared to less than one in five nationally. Again boys are more successful than girls at this level.
167. All students achieve very well in comparison to their earlier attainment. In Year 12, all students have gained insights into probability, even though they were from three different teaching sets in Year 11. As some of their course is self-study, further mathematics students learn well independently so that they can use their knowledge in the next lesson.
168. Teaching is good. In all lessons, teachers probe for understanding of concepts with carefully chosen questions. In mechanics lessons, a practical approach is used to generate discussion and to help clarify misconceptions. Teachers' specialist knowledge is very good and allows them to give very clear explanations. Teachers adopt a lesson structure which allows for the discussion of key ideas before moving on to the next stage in learning. Pace is appropriate.
169. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The good standard of education provided and the pass rates at A-level have been maintained. The creation of two teaching groups in Year 12 ensures that numbers are manageable. Although, in some lessons, there is too much exposition by the teacher, rather than discussion, students experience a range of teaching techniques which help with their understanding.

Mathematics across the school

170. Mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory in the sixth form. Students use their mathematical skills well in a number of subjects, notably geography and physical education. In geography, for example, they use sophisticated statistical models when analysing data. In physical education the mathematics of projectiles is studied. But these occur as part of the curriculum in these subjects and are not part of a whole-school focus on numeracy across the curriculum.

SCIENCE

The focus was on A-level and AS courses in physics. The A and AS level course in chemistry was sampled. Two lessons were seen and work analysed. Teaching and learning were good, and standards were above course expectations.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good knowledge of the subject helps students to learn well.

- Excellent relationships and attitudes make lessons productive.
- Very good assessment tracks students' progress.
- A proportion of students fail to gain a grade in AS level examinations.

Commentary

171. Results in the GCE A-level examinations vary and the small number of candidates makes analysis unreliable. However, in 2002, half the candidates gained the highest grades and, in 2003, they all did so. Results for 2004 show that more than three-quarters of those entered gained these grades. In all three years, no student failed to gain a grade. Results in the GCE AS level examinations have been above average for the last three years because of the proportion of the highest grades. However, although all candidates gained a grade in 2003, more than half failed to gain a grade in 2002 and, in 2004 this proportion was more than one quarter.
172. The standard of work seen during the inspection is above the national expectation. Students in Year 13 use a very wide range of scientific formulae competently. They manipulate equations, substitute numerical values and calculate results correctly. They draw very good graphs or use computers to collect, display and graph practical results. Students in Year 12 have been following the AS-level course for only a short time but are making rapid progress in understanding and measuring refractive index and show good concentration and application to their work.
173. Teaching and learning are very good. The best lessons are interesting and very well planned. Teachers use questions well to allow students to recall previous knowledge, to apply it to new situations and draw logical conclusions. They show expert knowledge of the subject. Students learn very well and their excellent attitude plays a significant part in making lessons effective. As a result of this and the very good teaching and assessment, achievement is good overall and very good in Year 13. When students' prior knowledge of science is weak, they make less progress and often fail to gain a grade in the AS level examination. Few females study physics, in line with the national situation. When they do, standards are in line with their previous attainment.
174. Leadership and management are good. Teachers co-operate to teach all areas of the subject between them. Students' progress is very well assessed and documented. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

HUMANITIES

Geography

The provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students entered for A and AS level examinations achieved a grade D or above in 2003 and 2004.
- Students make good use of ICT resources and are given plenty of opportunity to undertake fieldwork and geographical enquiries.
- Students are very enthusiastic about studying geography, finding the work stimulating, relevant and interesting.
- Students receive plenty of practical advice about how to succeed.

Commentary

175. Sixth form students make good progress and achieve well, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. A-level results have remained strong since the time of the last inspection. In 2003 and 2004, all students passed at A-level with at least a grade D. In 2004, AS level results were impressive, with all five students entered obtaining a D grade and three reaching grade A. Although entry numbers are relatively small, in recent years, male students have gained better results than female students. Students are good at discussing issues and seeking out information. They are confident users of ICT but do not have access to a wide range of geographical websites. Sometimes, they are hindered when using case studies by a lack of factual knowledge about places, locations and geographical features. Fieldwork forms an important part of the course.
176. Students have very good attitudes to their studies. They are very well motivated and are eager to learn. Staying-on rates are good. The standard of coursework is high, thanks to the combination of a high level of commitment from the students and skilful teaching. Students are able to work independently or in groups in a very responsible way.
177. The impressive achievements at AS and A-levels are the direct result of consistently good teaching. Students appreciate being well taught by friendly, enthusiastic and resourceful teachers who devote a great deal of attention to their individual learning needs. Teachers go out of their way to make lessons interesting and intellectually stimulating. They cover topics in substantial depth and offer students good practical advice about how to organise their studies. In the lessons seen particularly good use was made of well chosen extracts from video programmes which provided plenty of facts coupled with cogent visual images. As a consequence, students could argue a reasoned case backed up with convincing examples. Assessment is good; students' essays, assignments and tests are diagnostically marked, with clear reference to the features that yield the best results. Students' notes are not checked carefully enough to spot any significant inaccuracies or omissions, especially in Year 12.
178. The sixth form provision for geography is well managed. The team of three teachers are fully committed to maintaining high standards. They keep up- to- date with current developments in the subject, including the examination procedures. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The many strengths of the subject that were reported upon in 1998 have been maintained, with improvements in the use of ICT and assessment.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is characterised by good specialist knowledge, thorough lesson planning and preparation and high expectations of students' achievement.
- There is a positive relationship between teacher and students which fosters a climate of critical enquiry and analysis of subject content.
- There is insufficient use of ICT as a teaching and learning resource during lessons.
- Few students attain the higher grades at A-level.

Commentary

179. Standards are in line with the national expectation, although A level examination results in 2003 were below the national average, with few students obtaining the higher grades. The indications are that the 2004 A level results are similar. In all lessons observed, attainment was in line with the national expectation.
180. Teaching is consistently good, being suitably challenging and with lessons proceeding at a good pace. Teachers are enthusiastic and motivating and they have high expectations of students' achievement. Students' attention and engagement are maintained through varied activities. New concepts are clearly explained and illustrated, and where possible, made relevant to students' experiences. Skilful questioning encourages students to be analytical and critical. Lessons provide opportunities to make connections between different topics and to rehearse and consolidate prior learning. Written feedback is of a good standard and includes guidance to students on how to improve future assignments. During lessons, the majority of students learn and achieve well, making good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the subject.
181. The teachers' high expectations encourage very good attitudes, behaviour and motivation for learning. Students participate well in activities and respect the views of others in discussion. Relations between students and their teacher are very positive. Students reported that they enjoyed studying psychology, that their lessons were interesting and that they were well supported by their teacher.
182. Teaching and learning opportunities in lessons are limited by a lack of multimedia and ICT resources. This is an area for development included in the subject development plan.
183. The teacher in charge has vision for the development of psychology and provides good leadership. Management of the subject is also good. There is a good development plan that identifies relevant targets. A number of measures have been introduced to raise attainment, including the introduction of individual student action plans.
184. Psychology was not reported on during the last inspection.

Religious education in the sixth form

185. Provision in the sixth form was sampled during the inspection. Two lessons were observed and examination results analysed. From this evidence, standards in the sixth form are above those expected nationally and achievement is good. However, the numbers involved in examinations for the past few years have been small which makes statistical comparison difficult. Nevertheless the department has had 100 per cent pass rate for students taking the course at AS and A-level for the past few years. The popularity of the subject has grown and numbers in the current sixth form have increased significantly. Teaching combined Year 12 and 13 groups has been successful in the past but the increased numbers now put a heavy workload on staff. Good teaching enables students to make a quick transition from GCSE to advanced level work. As a consequence, learning is also good and students show confidence in discussing and sharing their ideas.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Provision in design and technology (DT) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' command of their specialist subject is very good.
- Students' have very good attitudes to the subject.
- Students make good use of ICT.
- The most capable students do not attain high grades.

Commentary

186. In 2003, standards at AS and A-level were around that expected. The most recent results for AS level are around the average when compared with national results for the previous year. Group sizes are relatively small.
187. The work of students seen in lessons, in their portfolios and discussed with them confirms that standards are overall average and achievement is satisfactory. Students perform well on those parts of the course that test their ability to use their skills in research and analysis. They confidently use a broad range of ICT systems for imagery, research and development and computer-aided design. Most students can explain their designs with growing confidence and are able to relate these to the real world of work.
188. All students show a high level of interest and enthusiasm for the subject. When they are working individually on computers in lessons, they support each other. Relevant technical discussions are common, contributing to good learning. Students show imagination and flair for example, in the design and manufacture of a trailer for a kayak and a storage unit.
189. The quality of teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good command of the subject and transmit their enthusiasm for the subject to their students. They are very good at anticipating aspects that are likely to be misunderstood. Teachers make very good use of industrial visits to set realistic contexts for project work. Assessment is good. While students are working individually, teachers make good use of their time,

discussing work with students and suggesting further avenues of enquiry. However, the most capable students have not yet developed a high enough level of critical evaluation skills.

190. The subject is well led and managed. A good system of recording and tracking the progress of individual students is used well to help students negotiate their own targets for improvement. The subject has made good improvement since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Provision for art and design is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at A-level are well above the national average.
- Students exhibit high levels of independence and creativity.
- Students are very confident artists using a range of media to express their ideas.
- ICT is used very effectively as another medium as well as for research.

Commentary

191. The standards in art and design are well above those expected nationally. The provision for AS and A level gives students the opportunity to build upon their previous experience and achieve high levels of success. Numbers opting for art and design are greater than average for similar schools and are a clear testament to the popularity of the subject at this stage.
192. Results in A-level examinations have been well above the national average. These results have been consistently high since the last inspection. Students studying AS levels similarly attain high standards and most carry on to A-level.
193. Progress and achievement are very high. Students exhibit significant levels of skill, knowledge and understanding which they use to explore and experiment. They use an extensive range of media, and materials are often combined to create constructions in mixed media studies, ceramics or textile studies. The work is inventive, exciting and challenging. On entering Year 12, students are already in the habit of making good use of their sketchbooks or journals and these are a significant feature in their work. Consequently, students have a secure knowledge and understanding of research in a range of media, equipment and processes.
194. The frequent study trips abroad to New York, Barcelona, Madrid, Tuscany and visits to local and national galleries and other cultural venues impact significantly upon the depth and range of their critical and contextual knowledge and understanding. They also help students to achieve very high standards, particularly in drawing. The weekly life-drawing class, tutored by staff from a local college, also has a significant impact upon standards and quality of drawing in Year 13. It is attended by students from partner sixth forms.

195. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form are excellent. It is based upon very high levels of knowledge and expertise and the regular involvement of contemporary artists in residence. Assessment procedures are excellent, students are encouraged to work independently but they regularly discuss their work with the teacher and share ideas and potential areas for research.
196. Leadership and management in the sixth form are excellent. The Arts College status has had a significant impact upon provision for art and design in the sixth form, and improvement since the last inspection has been extremely good. There are spacious studios, including the digital imaging and Internet facility, exhibition galleries, and a team of specialist teachers and artists in residence, including post-graduate teaching students, who cater for a wide range of specialisms and provide high levels of expertise. They have a significant effect on the very high standards and the high levels of achievement in Years 12 and 13.

Music

Provision for music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a high level of commitment on the part of staff and students.
- Schemes of work and assessment procedures for AS and A level courses are not developed enough.
- Students respond well to the demanding teaching and work independently to good effect.
- Access to ICT is good.

Commentary

197. The standards of attainment are above expectations, and achievement is good. Higher grades were well represented in the results of the AS level examinations in 2004. All students have moved forward to A-level and they have been joined by one additional student from another school. There is currently one student studying music in Year 12.
198. Students work with creative maturity and enthusiasm. Where possible they support each other and help explain difficult and demanding concepts. All ask questions that reveal insight into the problems being tackled. In a Year 12 lesson, the student was able to grasp the characteristics of Romantic Era compositions illustrated by recordings of Rachmaninov. Subsequently, a piano improvisation was performed, reflecting many identified characteristics. In a Year 13 lesson, students grappled with advanced chord construction and were finally able to play and write accurate examples.
199. As a result of very good teaching, students are making very good progress in their learning. The music department's access to ICT adds an important dimension to the post-16 curriculum and students are increasingly competent in manipulating the software to good musical effect.
200. Leadership of the subject is good, and management satisfactory. Current arrangements for sharing the teaching of Year 12 music with another local secondary school are allowing greater flexibility and additional teaching time. Procedures for monitoring and

evaluating this provision are satisfactory. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and the teachers' ability to demonstrate their musicianship inspires students. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

Drama

201. Drama was not inspected, but was sampled. Indications are that the provision is very good. In 2003, the performance of students who took A-level Theatre Studies was above the national average. All eight students gained a grade between A and E, including five at grade A or B. In 2004, both students entered have gained a grade C. Students appreciate the course and are progressing very well. During the lesson sampled, nine students used the techniques of "freeze framing" and "hot seating" to explore aspects of 'A Taste of Honey'. The teacher used her very good specialist knowledge to make her expectations clear to students and they responded with enthusiasm and a high standard of performance.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are good because teaching is very good.
- Students achieve well because they are motivated to succeed.
- Very good leadership and management have a significant impact on raising levels of attainment.
- Assessment and monitoring procedures are rigorous and very effective because they provide clear guidance on how to improve.
- Deficiencies in accommodation hinder attainment and progress in theoretical study.
- There is limited opportunity for students to undertake leadership or other national award-bearing courses either in or outside the formal curriculum.

Commentary

202. Standards are good. The department offers AS and A-level courses in sport and physical education. In 2003, A-level results were above the national average and provisional results for 2004 are also high. In both 2003 and 2004 every student received a pass grade. Students taking A-level physical education often achieve better results than they do in their other subjects, particularly the boys. There is a wide range of ability amongst the students choosing to take the examination and the majority meet or exceed their expected grade, based on previous GCSE and Year 12 AS scores. This represents good achievement. Although far more boys than girls choose to study the course, girls' results are just as good. Students' positive attitude, very good behaviour and commitment to the subject contribute strongly to the standards achieved.

203. In AS and A-level examination work, most students are performing at the level that would be expected at this stage in relation to their predicted grades. Higher-attaining students in Year 13 absorb information easily, and grasp new concepts and ideas with enthusiasm. They expand on what they have learned, hypothesise intelligently and work effectively in pairs or groups on tasks requiring combined problem-solving skills. A

minority of students struggle to cope with the academic rigour of A-level work. Therefore, in most lessons, teachers work very hard to try to involve all students in discussion and practical activities. They usually check the extent to which individuals have understood the work and adapt the level of questioning appropriately, to challenge students of different levels of attainment. As a result, the majority of students make good progress.

204. In a very good Year 12 lesson about the muscle system, the teacher expertly used a carefully prepared PowerPoint presentation, introducing the information to the students in small sections, with excellent use of questions between each section to reinforce the information, to encourage students to exemplify and expand on the material and to determine any aspects they did not fully understand. By the end of the lesson, students had a very good knowledge of different muscle types, their role and function and were able to relate this to examples of sporting activities.
205. Non-examination students attend an activities session each week. Where teachers work directly with the students they continue to improve their skill and understanding in their chosen sport. In trampolining, students work on individual routines. Advice from the teacher combined with good technical analysis and support from the other students help them improve their performance. Students working without direct support of a teacher, for example in table tennis and badminton, are less motivated to improve the standard of their play and less active in their participation. Whilst participation in extra-curricular activities is not as extensive as in the main school, good opportunities are still provided for those students who wish to take part. Some students continue to participate at representative levels from district through to international level. Although many sixth form students effectively help younger students in lessons and in extra-curricular sport, there are currently limited opportunities for students to further develop their leadership skills by undertaking national leadership or other sports award-bearing courses. About thirty students each year complete the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at silver or gold level.
206. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have a very good understanding of the requirements of the course and the examination and provide very high levels of support and guidance. They use their very good knowledge of the subject to explain and develop concepts clearly. Overall, lessons are planned effectively and the work is structured well around the learning needs of students. Some teaching is excellent.
207. The number of hours provided for the department to cover the examination courses has been significantly reduced over the past year. As a result, teachers are now struggling to complete the syllabus, leave sufficient time for revision and also ensure their lessons continue to provide a good range of opportunities for students to take an active role in their own learning. There are not enough planned opportunities for teachers to share their most successful strategies to help students learn effectively, to help counteract the impact of this reduction in teaching time. Teachers assess work thoroughly so that students are aware of their progress and what they need to do to improve. The recent introduction of self-assessment by students has further enhanced the teachers' understanding of the specific needs of individuals.
208. Leadership is very good. There is a clear vision which is focused on raising standards. A strong team approach has been established to embrace change. Management is also very good. Work is well organised, with good attention being given to course requirements and staff work to their strengths when assigned to cover aspects of

examination work. The department does not have a base classroom for theory lessons and this limits teachers' ability to make regular use of modern technology or other visual resources in their teaching and to adopt a wider range of teaching approaches.

209. Since the previous inspection, the department has made good progress, particularly in developing more rigorous, systematic assessment procedures.

Vocational education

Provision in the leisure and tourism subjects is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers facilitate learning effectively and build students' confidence.
- Teachers have high expectations of students and this raises achievement.
- Students have positive attitudes and take good responsibility for their own learning.
- The arrangement for teaching three separate courses at two different levels at one time is unsatisfactory.
- Teaching resources are not yet adequate to meet the specific needs of students.

Commentary

210. Standards are in line with national expectations. The focus of the inspection was on Advanced Vocational courses in travel and tourism and leisure and recreation, and also on the Intermediate GNVQ in leisure and tourism. In most lessons, all three courses are taught together. Results on the Intermediate GNVQ course are in line with the national average, with all students achieving at least a pass and one-third a merit. This is good achievement by students with lower than average prior attainment. There are no results for the newly introduced AVCE courses.

211. Many of the AVCE students who have taken a GNVQ course in leisure and tourism have lower levels of prior attainment on entry to advanced courses than normally expected, but the courses are also attracting more able students. All students on the GNVQ and AVCE courses achieve well because they are interested in the content of their course, are highly motivated and have very positive attitudes to work. Students understand how to use the assessment criteria from their units to help them improve, and many work very well independently towards achieving higher grades.

212. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations for students. This builds students' confidence and self-belief and encourages them to outperform their predicted grades. Teachers organise learning effectively, sharing their good knowledge of the subject during individual progress reviews with their students. As a result, students work hard to take responsibility to plan, organise and improve their own work. Students make good use of the Internet for research and take opportunities to learn at first-hand from visits to different tourist organisations. They use ICT very well to present work effectively and use e-mails well to follow up visits and seek further information.

213. Leadership is very good and management is satisfactory. The curriculum leader has a clear vision for the success of all the vocational courses. There are no formal opportunities to share good practice amongst teachers but informal communication is

good and supportive because of the energy of the curriculum leader. There are no detailed schemes of work but teachers use appropriate commercially published teaching and learning resources to support learning. However these have not yet been adapted to meet the day-to-day needs of students. Arrangements for tracking and reviewing students' progress are good. The school is committed to change the present unsatisfactory arrangements, where three courses and two levels are taught at one time and to improve students' access to specialist teachers for each of the individual courses.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

