

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE BISHOP'S STORTFORD HIGH SCHOOL**

Bishop's Stortford

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117577

Headteacher: Mr A Goulding

Lead inspector: Mr M Beale

Dates of inspection: 7 – 11 February 2005

Inspection number: 268950

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: Foundation  
Age range of students: 11 to 18  
Gender of students: Male 11-16: mixed in the sixth form  
Number on roll: 1076

School address: London Road  
Bishop's Stortford  
Hertfordshire  
Postcode: CM23 3LU

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Appropriate authority: Governing body  
Name of chair of governors: Mr R Stock

Date of previous inspection: 1 March 1999

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school has become a college specialising in mathematics and computing since the last inspection. Numbers on roll have fallen slightly in recent years, although it remains broadly the same size as other schools. The vast majority of the students are of white-British backgrounds with no minority ethnic groups represented in significant numbers. There are no students at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. Many students come from very favourable socio-economic backgrounds and the proportion entitled to a free school meal is well below the national average. The proportion of students identified with special educational needs is below average and the number with statements of their special needs is well below average. The school selects five per cent of its Year 7 intake based on their musical aptitude and five per cent on sporting aptitude. Attainment on entry to the main school is well above average. Over 90 per cent of the students stay on into the sixth form where they are joined by a significant number of girls. This makes it much larger than other sixth forms. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is average. A very high proportion of the students continue their studies in higher education when they leave, many going onto the more prestigious universities. The school achieved Investors in People status in 2002 and received a Schools' Achievement Award for its GCSE results in 2003.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19385	Martin Beale	Lead inspector	
9708	Sylvia Daintrey	Lay inspector	
1795	Joyce Sanderson	Team inspector	English
32379	Bob Brewster	Team inspector	Mathematics
4126	Clive Parsons	Team inspector	Science Chemistry (sixth form)
8052	Ken McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
30563	Jackie Pentlow	Team inspector	Religious education
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
31345	Kay Arthur	Team inspector	Design and technology
33015	Richard Winter	Team inspector	Geography
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	History Government and politics (sixth form)
12408	Alan Frith	Team inspector	Modern languages French (sixth form)
31705	John Mason	Team inspector	Music
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Physical education Business education (sixth form)
28002	Sue Taylor	Team inspector	Psychology (sixth form) Special educational needs English as an additional language
4351	Jeanne Strickland	Team inspector	Media studies (sixth form)

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a very good school which** provides very good value for money and is highly thought of in the local community. The high quality of much of the teaching enables the students to achieve very well throughout the school. Standards are well above average by GCSE and above average in the sixth form. The headteacher and senior leadership team are successfully focusing the work of teachers on improving the quality of provision. The students are highly committed to their studies; they participate enthusiastically and in large numbers in the wide range of activities on offer. This plays a significant part in generating a happy and harmonious atmosphere of respect and tolerance as well as a very purposeful environment in which the learning and the personal development of the students can thrive.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- a significant number of teachers consistently teach lessons that are lively, interesting and engage the students who are motivated to work hard and to be successful;
- the headteacher has high expectations of the staff and students; he is providing a very clear educational direction based on rigorous systems to manage and improve the work of the school;
- the school seeks very successfully to broaden the students' experiences and enrich their lives through the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits and the stimulating visitors who come to share their experiences with all age groups;
- well above average attendance levels, very positive attitudes to learning and a strong commitment from the students significantly enhance their achievement;
- medical arrangements are inadequate for students who are unwell or have accidents during the school day.

There has been very good improvement since the last inspection and firm foundations are in place for further sustained progress. Standards have continued to rise, the quality of teaching has improved and identified weaknesses have been tackled successfully. Much of this has been possible because there are clear, systematic and more effective structures for managing the work of all staff and improving the quality of their work. The senior leadership team has established rigorous procedures for monitoring teaching and evaluating the impact of action taken to secure further improvements. However, these processes have not significantly developed the leadership role of other staff.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A	A	A	A
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	C	B	C	

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

**Achievement is very good throughout all phases of the school.** Overall standards are well above average by Years 9 and 11 and above average in the sixth form, although A Level results fell slightly in 2004. Year 9 test results have followed an improving trend in recent years and were well above average in 2004. GCSE results have also been improving from a high starting point. Achievement in individual subjects is at least good

with the exception of art and design where achievement is satisfactory. Standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well above average throughout the school. Students with special educational needs and those identified as gifted and talented also achieve very well. There is no significant difference in the performance of students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

**The students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good.** Their very positive approach to school contributes significantly to all that they achieve both academically and personally. The students are keen and interested in lessons and when participating in other activities. Behaviour is very good in the main school and excellent in the sixth form. Attendance is well above average. Students are punctual to school and move purposefully to their lessons.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education is very good as is the quality of teaching and learning.** Teachers have high expectations and many regularly teach lessons of a high quality. This develops the students' learning very well and encourages them to develop a wide range of skills to support their further study. The curriculum has limited vocational elements, but generally meets the students' needs well. The wide range of enrichment activities extends the students' experiences and supports their personal development and their achievement considerably. Assessment has improved and the information is used well to advise and guide the students. Very strong and effective links are established with the local and the wider community. The visitors to the school broaden the students' outlook and provide a valuable insight into a wide range of walks of life.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** There is a clear vision for the further development of the school, based on a thorough evaluation of its strengths, an accurate identification of what needs to be done to improve and careful and systematic planning to achieve its priorities. The headteacher provides very clear leadership and is ably supported by an influential senior team and an effective governing body. Other members of staff with management responsibilities fulfil these well, but their potential to take a greater leadership role is not consistently promoted. Governors have high expectations of the staff and are challenging and supportive. However, there is scope for the governing body to have greater involvement in shaping the strategic direction of the school to provide a framework to guide the management of its improvement. Statutory requirements are met with the exception of the daily act of collective worship and medical arrangements.

## **PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents are generally happy with the school and what it provides. They recognise that the school offers a wide range of activities particularly in sport, drama and music. The students are if anything more positive. They are very pleased with all that the school offers and feel that their teachers are committed to challenging them and helping them to succeed. They are particularly happy with the computer resources in the school.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- develop further the leadership role of heads of department;
- provide better study and social facilities for sixth form students;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- for the act of collective worship;
- to provide suitable arrangements and facilities for the students' medical and first aid requirements.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT THE BISHOP'S STORTFORD HIGH SCHOOL

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a very good sixth form.** A measure of its success and popularity is that attracts large numbers of students, both male and female, from other schools. Student achievement is very good largely because much of the teaching inspires them to work hard. The further success of the sixth form is the high proportion of students continuing into higher education, with many going on to the more prestigious universities. The students show considerable commitment to their studies and to participating in the wide range of other activities that are on offer. Their behaviour is excellent. Sixth form provision has improved well since the last inspection and is very cost-effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- achievement is particularly good in religious education and politics because of lively and engaging teaching that stimulates the students and develops a thirst for learning;
- highly effective leadership of sixth form provision is sharply focusing the work of teachers on improving aspects of teaching that develop high level learning skills in the students;
- sixth form students play a significant and visible part in the life of the school; they take responsibilities maturely and contribute much to the school's harmonious atmosphere;
- promoting the personal development of the students is a high priority for staff, which is achieved very successfully;
- there is very limited space or suitable resources to enable private and independent study other than in the main school library.

### QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>Provision in English is very good.</b> Achievement is very good as a result of the stimulating and interactive teaching and the students' high levels of motivation and interest.
	<b>Provision in French is very good.</b> Students achieve very well because of the very effective teaching and the very broad range of enrichment activities.
Mathematics	<b>Provision in mathematics is good.</b> Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and their positive attitudes. A Level results and current standards are above average.
Science	<b>Provision in chemistry is good.</b> Standards are above average and achievement good. Positive attitudes and knowledgeable, well-structured teaching is leading to good learning.
Information and communication technology	<b>Provision in information and communication technology is very good.</b> Very good achievement based on very effective teaching and positive student attitudes is leading to well above average standards.
Humanities	<b>Provision in geography is very good.</b> Standards are above average especially at the higher grades. This represents very good achievement, which results from very good teaching and learning.
	<b>Provision in politics is excellent.</b> A Level results and current standards are well above average representing excellent achievement for the students who have not previously studied the subject.
	<b>Provision in psychology is good.</b> Standards are above average. Well structured teaching and the students' positive attitudes together with

effective individual support are leading to good learning.

**Provision in religious education is excellent.** A consistently very high level of challenge and pace in lessons is enabling the students to attain very high standards with excellent achievement.

Engineering, technology and manufacturing

**Provision in design and technology is very good.** Standards are well above average and build on very well from GCSE performance. Achievement is very good because of the students' positive attitudes and the challenging teaching.

Visual and performing arts and media

**Provision in media studies is good.** Students are achieving well on this new course as a result of good teaching. However, facilities are not suitable for the most effective teaching of the subject.

**Provision in music is very good.** The very good teaching and the wide range of enrichment activities is resulting in very good achievement and well above average standards.

Business

**Provision in business studies is very good.** Teaching is very good across the range of courses provided. This and the students' positive approach to learning are leading to very good achievement and above average standards.

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

## **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Female students and others who join the school at this stage are very pleased with the support they are given to help them to settle into the sixth form. The advice and guidance provided for all students enables them to have a clear picture of what their academic goals should be and how to achieve them. They are also involved well in establishing personal targets and in developing action plans for their achievement.

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

**Leadership and management of sixth form provision are very good.** There is a very sharp focus for the improvement of aspects of teaching identified following a thorough review of sixth form provision. The day-to-day management of the sixth form is such that all activities run very smoothly. The work of the team of sixth form tutors is aimed at ensuring the highest achievement for the students. The head of sixth form and his team act as very good role models, particularly for the key feature of improving teaching and learning. The management of provision in most subjects is working effectively in support of the current priorities for improvement.

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

Students are very positive about their life in the sixth form. They are enthusiastic about the wide range of activities that enrich and broaden their experiences and recognise the commitment this requires from staff. The students do not always like having to use the library as their study area because of the lack of suitable facilities in the sixth form area; this is a shortcoming in provision which the inspection team also recognises.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is very good throughout the school. Standards are well above average by Years 9 and 11 and above average in the sixth form. There is no significant difference in the achievement of different ethnic groups, though numbers are too small to make valid comparisons. There is no overall difference in current standards and achievement in the sixth form between male and female students.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make very good progress in the main school and standards are well above average in virtually all subjects by Year 11.
- Students with special educational needs and those identified as gifted and talented are supported very effectively, enabling them to achieve very well throughout the school.
- Achievement is excellent in politics and religious education in the sixth form.
- The students' A Level results enable a very high proportion to continue into higher education, with many being admitted to prestigious universities.

#### Commentary

1. The school's Year 9 test results have been following an improving trend in recent years from what was already a very favourable position. Overall results in 2004 as well as results in each of English, mathematics and science were well above average. Mathematics and science results were more or less the same as in 2003, although English results fell. One consequence of this was that while mathematics results were well above and science results were above similar schools, performance in English was below that in similar schools. Current standards in each of these subjects are well above average by Year 9.

#### **Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004**

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.4 (39.1)	n/a (33.4)
mathematics	40.8 (40.6)	n/a (35.4)
science	37.3 (37.7)	n/a (33.6)

*There were 155 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

2. GCSE results have also risen at a similar rate to improvements nationally in recent years, again from a very favourable position. Overall results in 2004 as well as results in English, mathematics and science were well above average and well above results in similar schools. Current standards in all three subjects are well above average in Year 11. Results in all other subjects were significantly above average except for art and design where performance was close to the national average. The proportion of A\* and A grades in 2004 was double the national average, although there is evidence to show that this figure should have been higher, given the students' prior attainment. This is a matter that the school is seeking to tackle; as it has implications for how well prepared some students are for sixth form study at the highest levels. There were

slight variations in performance between subjects with there being significantly better performance in French, Spanish and history than in the average of the other subjects and significantly lower performance in double science and English language.

### **Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2004**

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	84 (82)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (99)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	44.3 (44.2)	34.9 (34.7)

*There were 159 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. The students' achievement is at least good in all subjects throughout the school. The only exceptions to this are in art and design and citizenship where achievement is satisfactory. Achievement is very good in modern foreign languages and in core religious education in Years 7 to 9. Achievement is also very good in GCSE religious education and in Years 10 and 11 in geography, history, information and communication technology and music. Standards in individual subjects are at least above average throughout the school and are well above average in modern foreign languages, music and GCSE religious education. Standards in Year 11 are also well above average in geography, history and information and communication technology.
4. The very good achievement in Years 7 to 11 is due to several factors. Much teaching is highly stimulating and motivates the students to try hard and do their best. They respond well to this and have very positive attitudes to their learning. Attendance rates are well above average, and the regular attendance of most students contributes to their success. The school also provides a very wide range of enrichment activities that support academic achievement very effectively as well as the students' personal development. The students also have very good skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology particularly in Years 10 and 11. These are utilised well to support their achievement.
5. Most of the students who have marked levels of special educational needs or who have statements make very good progress and achieve very well. Teachers know their needs well because they are provided with very good quality individual education plans, which are detailed and clear. Students who are identified as gifted and talented also achieve very well because teaching in most subjects is planned to provide a high level of challenge. Their achievement in music is outstanding because of the high status given to musicians and the appreciation shown of their performances.

### **Sixth form**

6. Results at A Level fell slightly in 2004 from above average in 2003. Male and female results were both above the average of their respective national results, although overall results were only in line with the national average. This anomaly was because male students do not do as well as female students and there were considerably more of the former entered for A Levels in 2004. However, the overall results were only very marginally below being judged to be above average. There was a 100 per cent pass rate in 2004. The average result per A Level entry and the proportion of the higher A and B grades were both above average. Other examination data indicates that the students who sat A Level in 2004 generally made at least satisfactory and often good progress from their GCSE results. The Year 12 students who sat AS Level in 2004 did better than this.

7. The most successful subjects at A Level in the last two years have been history, information and communication technology and religious studies. Results were well above average in both of 2003 and 2004 in each subject and were very high in religious studies in 2004. French results improved in 2004 to well above average. Results in politics were double the national average in terms of the number of A and B grades. The 2004 results were above average in English (literature), mathematics, chemistry, design and technology, music, physics and in information and communication technology VCE. By contrast, results were below average in 2004 in art and design and in VCE business studies, although in both cases this was an improvement from the well below average results in 2003. Examination data also shows that the students made significant progress in A Level in music and religious studies when compared with their overall GCSE results. However, a similar analysis shows students made insufficient progress in art and design and biology. This was also reflected in the lessons and work seen in both subjects during the inspection.

**Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2004**

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	96.0 (95.6)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	40.5 (40.0)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	260.2 (280.5)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 178 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

8. Student achievement is very good overall in the sixth form and standards are above average by Year 13. There is currently no overall difference between the performance of male and female students, although there are some differences in subjects such as French where male students are doing better than females. As in the main school, the most significant features that contribute to the very good achievement are the high quality of much of the teaching, the very positive approach of the students, their very good attendance and the wide range of enrichment activities. The students' competence in the basic skills of literacy, mathematics and the use of information and communication technology also contribute significantly. Achievement is at least good and standards are at least above average in all subjects inspected in detail, with particularly high levels of performance in politics and religious education. Students with special educational needs achieve very well as their needs are well known and teachers plan very effectively to meet them. Gifted and talented students achieve very well because the teaching provides a high level of challenge. This is augmented by links with outside organisations such as The English Schools Orchestra for music, the use of outside coaches in physical education and visits from and to industry in design and technology.

**Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Students' attitudes are very good throughout the school. Behaviour is very good in Years 7 to 11 and excellent in the sixth form. Students' personal qualities are very good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very effectively. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' very positive attitudes and high attendance rates are significant factors in their very good achievement.
- Students respond very well – and exceptionally well in the sixth form - to the often outstanding opportunities provided by the school to develop their personal and social skills.
- Students gain a very good understanding of a wide range of spiritual, moral and cultural issues and are very well prepared for life in a diverse society.
- The school is a very orderly, purposeful and harmonious environment in which students are able to make very good progress in their learning.

## Commentary

9. Students' attitudes to learning have improved since the last inspection when they were reported as being good. Most students respond with high levels of enthusiasm and involvement in the vast majority of their lessons across the school. This is a reflection of the very good, and occasionally excellent teaching which they receive. Students identified as gifted or talented respond very well because they are given high levels of challenge and their achievements are celebrated. Students with special educational needs generally have very positive attitudes to their work despite their difficulties. Students overall are very positive about the school because they greatly value the range of extra-curricular activities available to them and appreciate the support they get from individual teachers.
10. Because students enjoy their time at the school and are highly motivated to do as well as they can, their attendance rates are consistently well above the national average. The apparent exception in the last reporting year was due to the fact that the school remained officially open during a period of severe weather last winter. Last term, attendance had returned to the usual rate of around 95 per cent with negligible unauthorised absence. Punctuality is also very good, with few students arriving late at the beginning of the day. Movement between lessons has improved since the last inspection and most lessons start promptly so that little time is wasted. The school makes very good use of a fully computerised registration system, as well as administration staff and the Education Welfare Officer, to ensure that individual cases of non-attendance are picked up very quickly.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.0	School data	0.1
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

11. The school is very successful in its aim of helping students become well-rounded individuals. Personal development has improved since the last inspection when it was good. Through the excellent range of enrichment opportunities in which large numbers participate, students develop very high levels of skill in working together, taking responsibility and respecting each other. Sport, music and drama make a very considerable impact on these aspects of students' personal development. A remarkable feature of school life is the tradition of debate – which takes place both in lessons and in lunch-time clubs - when students argue their case and listen to others in a very well-disciplined and good-humoured way. Students in all years and of all abilities are very willing to contribute to the running of the school, whether it be helping

the canteen staff clear up after lunch-time, undertaking a wide variety of duties in the library, or organising House events and competitions. Students are keen to explore and reflect on life's fundamental questions, such as 'Is there life after death?' or the extent to which violence is justified when challenging prejudice or discrimination. The work of the religious education department, which includes an exceptional programme of nationally and internationally known speakers, introduces students extremely successfully to the breadth of faiths and ethnic backgrounds represented in Britain and the world. Subjects such as English, history, modern foreign languages, music and drama also make a major contribution to promoting all aspects of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, opportunities to contribute are missed in art and design. Assemblies contribute significantly to the moral, social and cultural ethos of the school but do not always give students the chance to reflect on an important issue through prayer, music or silence.

12. Students in all year groups behaved very well throughout the inspection. The students are friendly and courteous as they move around the site. There was no disruption seen in any lesson, including in Year 9 about which some parents had concerns. Behaviour was often immaculate, such as in a Year 9 science lesson taught by a newly qualified teacher to a middle set which included some students with behavioural difficulties. There were a considerable number of exclusions last term – including two permanent exclusions – which involved a small group of students from Year 9. Overall, the rate of exclusions, although it has increased since the last inspection, is in line with what can be expected in a school of this size and type. Members of staff are working effectively to monitor and support those few students who exhibit a pattern of misbehaviour while making clear that certain incidents will not be tolerated. There is a small amount of verbal harassment, which sometimes includes racist remarks, but students and parents are confident that this is dealt with well when reported.

***Ethnic background of students***

***Exclusions in the last school year***

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1018	81	3
White – any other White background	16	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	6	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	7	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	4	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	7	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	4	0	0

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

## **Sixth form**

13. Students' attitudes to learning in Years 12 and 13 are very good in the large majority of lessons and excellent in some courses such as politics and music technology. Students on vocational courses apply themselves very well to the required tasks. As in the main school, these very positive responses are a reflection of the high quality teaching which students of all abilities experience. Occasionally, for example in media studies, students are rather passive because they are not encouraged sufficiently to interact and collaborate with each other.
14. Attendance is very good because students are strongly committed to completing their courses successfully and the drop-out rate is very low. The head of sixth form sets high expectations of attendance and punctuality and monitors absences carefully so that students are challenged or supported as required.
15. Students' personal development is excellent. Female students – and the few male students who come from other schools – are integrated exceptionally well into sixth form life so that they feel completely comfortable and included in all activities. Excellent relationships are fostered by the mixed form groups and joint activities involving Year 12 and Year 13 students. Most sixth form courses, including the general studies programme of speakers, promote students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development to an even higher standard than in the main school. Students respond in an extremely mature manner to the responsibilities they are given to run the sixth form centre, to produce the school newspaper and undertake a host of duties in the main school. They are very strongly involved in putting on their own productions and shows. Large numbers of students undertake various forms of voluntary work and community service. These include running a branch of the Rotary Club (Interact) which raises very considerable sums of money for charities as well as awareness of national and international issues such as poverty and homelessness. Students behave to the highest possible standard and are excellent ambassadors for the school.

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

The quality of education is very good. There is much highly effective teaching, which moves learning forward at a rapid pace. The experiences of the students are greatly enhanced by the extensive range of clubs, teams, activities and visits. Visitors to the school make a valuable contribution to the students' personal and academic development. The growing links with other schools are being exploited well to support the transfer arrangements for Year 7 students and to provide routes for students who wish to choose vocational courses after Year 11.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. Assessment processes are good in the main school and very good in the sixth form.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers in the best lessons engage the students skilfully and challenge them to think, respond in detail and back their answers with securely formed arguments.
- The national strategy to improve teaching and learning has been adopted very effectively and teachers use a wide range of methods to interest and generate pace to learning.

- High expectations and skilled questioning challenge the students, but there are times when teachers do not involve students sufficiently in their learning.
- Where teachers use new technology, they do so with confidence that enhances teaching and extends learning considerably.
- The individual learning needs of students are met well through support and adapted activities and methods.
- Assessment information is used well to give students a picture of how well they are doing and the next steps in their learning as well as to provide individual support in lessons.

## Commentary

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 199 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
17 (9%)	62 (31%)	76 (38%)	41 (21%)	3 (2%)	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.*

16. The focus in recent years on monitoring the work of teachers to improve their classroom performance has met with considerable success. The lessons of a significant number of teachers are regularly very good or excellent. The school has several high quality practitioners. These teachers motivate the students through their lively teaching, high levels of subject expertise and interest in the material that they are dealing with. The students respond by participating in all aspects of the lessons, working hard with high levels of commitment and concentration. Consequently, they learn new knowledge and ideas rapidly and develop skills that enable them to take responsibility for their learning. Teaching is particularly effective throughout the school in English, information and communication technology, religious education and modern foreign languages. It is also very good in Years 10 and 11 in geography, history and music. The only shortcomings in a very small number of lessons are when the teacher dominates proceedings too much, resulting in the students not becoming engaged in the lesson or when some minor disruptions and lack of concentration are not dealt with effectively.
17. Teachers have successfully adopted the principles and guidance of the national strategy to improve teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9. Very many have also adapted these to inform their teaching and support student learning in Years 10 and 11. They plan with clear objectives for the students' learning in each lesson. They introduce these to the students at the start of the lesson and return to them at the end. This helps the students to understand the purpose of what they are doing and enables them to evaluate the success in achieving the lesson's goals. Starter activities are used to focus minds on the lesson to come. These are varied and inventive, generally being much more than just a recap of what has gone before. Review sessions at the ends of lessons are used very skilfully to evaluate the degree of success in meeting the objectives and to extend the students further.
18. Many teachers are highly skilled at involving the students in their lessons. They use their subject knowledge and expertise to plan interesting activities and put new material over in an exciting manner. The questioning techniques of the best teachers are very refined. Their questioning is open-ended where appropriate and carefully focused to involve as many students as possible. Students are required to back-up any answers that they give with reasoned arguments. This helps to deepen their understanding and challenges them to think carefully about what they are learning.

These skilled teachers also confidently deal with the difficult aspects of the material that they are teaching. The teachers themselves encourage students to question; demonstrate their high levels of expertise by the flexible way in which they respond to the students' problems or misconceptions. These techniques support the learning of all but are particularly effective in challenging and extending the higher-attaining students and those identified as gifted and talented. The variety of methods and activities employed also motivate the students and ensure that all learning styles are given the opportunity to develop. Features that work successfully include pair and group work as well as the direct support given to individuals during lessons.

19. The school has invested considerably in new technology, in part as a result of its recently gained specialist status for mathematics and computing. Subjects such as modern foreign languages and geography have grasped the opportunity to use interactive whiteboards and do so effectively to enhance the quality of their teaching. Computers are used by other teachers to enliven their teaching and to support the students' learning. This is starting to become commonplace in the students' experiences of lessons in most subjects, but is dependent to some extent on the confidence and level of expertise of the individual teacher. Inadequate use of new technology is a shortcoming of teaching in art and design.
20. Special educational needs staff and subject teachers work closely together to support the learning of students with special educational needs. A good variety of teaching methods are used to meet their needs. These include effective teaching in very small groups, team teaching, visual approaches to learning and the carefully planned use of teaching assistants. There is limited teacher assistant support, but where seen it is very effective.
21. In most subjects, teachers assess work thoroughly and constructively, both verbally and through marking. All members of staff have undertaken training on new systems and to develop the use of assessment to inform learning. Students mostly know their levels and grades, their targets and how to improve. Where there is scope for further improvement is in subjects such as art and design where assessment information is not used effectively to support the students' learning.

## **Sixth form**

22. The school had identified concerns with sixth form teaching through its evaluation and monitoring procedures. These concerns were largely because students did not seem to be making the same progress in the sixth form as in other parts of the school. Following a detailed review of teaching, an action plan has been drawn up to implement the features of what have been identified as high quality sixth form teaching. Many teachers already utilise these, and teaching has many of the high qualities that are evident in the main school. There is a strong base from which the school is well-placed to achieve improvements in teaching and learning. In subjects such as politics and religious education, teaching is regularly very good or excellent. These teachers involve the students, challenge their thinking and teach in a vibrant and lively manner. Overall, sixth form teaching is very good as in the main school. However, there are times, in some subjects, where the teacher dominates too much; this has the effect of turning the lesson into a lecture. The students are then not sufficiently engaged or involved in the learning process. Consequently, they make slower progress.

23. Strong relationships are a feature of the majority of sixth form lessons. The atmosphere generated is conducive to very productive learning and builds the confidence of the students to participate. Humour is used well to strengthen points being made and to retain the students' attention. Teachers use new technology very effectively to enhance the learning process. Students are also encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and to undertake work independently both within and outside lessons. This develops their skills well, such as in research or in presenting ideas to the class. Assessment is more effectively used in the sixth form than in the main school, particularly where the students self-assess using examination criteria.

## **The curriculum**

The good curriculum enables students to achieve well in nearly all subjects and supports their personal development effectively. Enrichment activities are extensive and add considerably to the quality of education provided. Accommodation is satisfactory for the main school, but is insufficient for the large number of students in the sixth form. Resources are satisfactory throughout the school. The school benefits from good staffing which is matched well to the needs of nearly all subjects.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Enrichment activities are excellent; they pervade the life of the school and support learning and students' personal development very effectively.
- Students are provided with a good range of general courses in Year 10 and in the sixth form, although the range of vocational and more specialised courses is relatively low at present.
- Key learning skills are developed well, but greater co-ordination and consistency is required to reach full potential, especially in work related learning and citizenship.
- There is insufficient study and social space for sixth form students.
- The school does not fulfil requirements for the daily act of collective worship.

## **Commentary**

24. The school has made good progress in removing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report and now meets statutory requirements, with the exception of providing a daily act of collective worship. However, progress towards introducing some new requirements and recommendations has sometimes been slow. Recent rapid improvements have been necessary to ensure that the requirements for citizenship are met. Students are becoming well informed citizens through acquiring a good knowledge and understanding of the issues, but they are not always aware that they are studying citizenship. Current assessment procedures do not monitor their progress in developing the skills of enquiry and communication and participation and responsible action. Provision for personal, social and health education is good. Work-related skills are developed in some subjects, such as science, geography and business education where co-operation, partnership and presentation are encouraged. However, students are not consistently made aware that these are important skills for work and enterprise.
25. Some steps have been taken to broaden the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 by providing a vocational element, linked to the school's specialist status. Planning, including co-operation with another local school and college, is well advanced to extend this provision in the near future and a co-ordinator has been appointed to support such developments. Further innovation is also being targeted to fast track students through their early years and into accredited courses. The school is careful

to evaluate the potential impact of such innovations to ensure maximum benefit and sustainable development. Careers education and support for students in choosing future courses is effective. There is good support from the careers adviser who is particularly effective in finding alternative career pathways for those students not staying on into the sixth form.

26. Opportunities for learning outside the school day are very extensive, often of exceptional quality and are very well supported by students. They provide many opportunities for students to take responsibility and develop their independence and contribute enormously to their personal development. Some are associated with subjects, such as mathematics and science clubs, which provide well for those with particular interests to go beyond what is taught in formal lessons. Some are more general, including debating and chess clubs, which support the development of important skills. Some intervention classes are targeted at students who have been identified as not yet achieving their potential. Participation in sport is very high and music provision is of a very high quality. There are master classes in creative writing and poetry. Links with industry, in science and technology are valuable with visits out to local companies and visitors coming in to school. All students benefit from participation in business simulations, supported by local companies. A wide range of high profile speakers visits the school each year to inform students about current events and issues.
27. Systems to identify those students in Years 7 to 11 who are gifted and talented are good and kept under constant review. Provision for these students is good, due to the school's focus on high attainment and excellent enrichment. Several students benefit from attending sessions at the National Academy. Provision for students with special educational needs is also good. Students have full access to the curriculum and are very well integrated into all aspects of school life, having similar responsibilities to others including acting as librarians. Teachers know the needs of students well because they are provided with very good quality individual education plans which are detailed and clear.
28. The school is fully staffed with specialist teachers throughout, with the exception of religious education, although this latter position has very limited adverse impact on students' achievement. There are good systems for developing and nurturing the expertise of those in training or those newly qualified and the school benefits from effective collaborative work with training colleges. There has been a significant improvement in the resources available in subjects over the past few years, so that resource levels are satisfactory. Those subjects which have so far benefited most from an injection of information and communication technology equipment, in line with the school's plan for specialist status, make good use of these resources. Teaching and learning have been enhanced as a result. The library is a very good resource. It is large, provided well with computers and stocked well with books and magazines; consequently it is well used for study and reading.
29. The accommodation is tight for the number of students in the school, despite much new building that has improved the overall quality considerably in some areas. While accommodation for the main school is judged satisfactory overall, some toilets need refurbishment, as do some science laboratories. The playground space is limited, and space for staff to plan, prepare and evaluate is limited. The accommodation for special educational needs is now very good, but rooms have little access to computers which inhibits work in the Year 10 support option and access to software to develop literacy skills. However, the most important weakness is the lack of available

dedicated space for medical care, with students being treated in the school foyer. The school does have an effective, strategic approach to continue to improve the accommodation systematically.

## **Sixth Form**

30. Curricular provision in the sixth form is good. The large number of students enables a wide range of AS and A Level courses to be offered which meet the needs and aspirations of those who continue their studies in the school. The range of options for students who may prefer or be better suited to vocational courses is more limited, but includes courses in leisure and recreation, business education and information and communication technology. The majority of students continue into higher education and much of the careers focus in the sixth form is on preparation for this, although students are well supported and informed at this level whatever their choices. Arrangements to help students transfer into the sixth form is good and effective in enabling those new to the school, especially female students, to make a smooth transition.
31. Systems are being developed to identify gifted and talented students, who are currently selected by high GCSE results. However, provision is very good because of the focus on individual teaching and exposure to a wide range of visiting speakers and trips outside to see those who are high achievers in their field. Students with special education needs are also well known and well provided for, with teachers planning very effectively to meet their needs.
32. Sixth form accommodation is too small for the numbers. Social areas are overcrowded and there is no specific area for independent study, although the library is used and effectively supervised. Students report that some teaching rooms are identified for them to use independently when not used for other classes, but they do not always have access to computers and use is not guaranteed.

## **Care, guidance and support**

Arrangements for the care, welfare, health and safety of students are satisfactory. Provision for supporting, advising and guiding students is good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. The school's involvement of students through seeking and acting on their views is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students are supported and guided effectively as they move through the school – and very effectively in the sixth form – to help them fulfil their academic and personal potential.
- Very good care and support are provided for students with particular needs.
- Members of staff pay good attention to the well-being of students but the arrangements for first aid and medical treatment are unsatisfactory.
- Students in Years 7 to 11 are starting to become more involved in reviewing their own progress and setting targets, but they do not have a sufficient influence on school life through the school council.

## **Commentary**

33. Arrangements for students joining the school in Year 7 are good so that new students, including those with special educational needs, settle in quickly and become confident and self-assured in their new environment. Students' academic progress is carefully monitored, which is an improvement since the last inspection, and effective strategies are put in place to help them move onto the next level in their work. The heads of lower school (Years 7 and 8) and middle school (Years 9, 10 and 11) are developing very good systems for identifying any problems that individuals may be experiencing and for dealing with them by meeting parents or advising staff. The new arrangements for mixed-age form groups within the two 'schools', although not yet fully supported by some older students, is starting to have a positive effect on provision for support and guidance, such as the increasing use of peer mentoring. Students in Years 10 and 11 are given good guidance about the post-16 options available to them. Guidance for Year 9 students on the implications of their GCSE choices has been limited in the past but is improving.
34. Special needs staff provide teachers with very good quality individual education plans and extensive information about students' learning, social, emotional, behavioural and medical needs. Care is taken to ensure that support in the classroom for students with special educational needs is discreet and agreed with the student. Teaching assistants are developing very appropriate skills to support students of all abilities, such as with counselling and physiotherapy. Students identified as gifted or talented are supported very well through high quality teaching, involvement with outside organisations and an extensive enrichment programme. The school takes very good care not to single out those who gained a place through the selection scheme. The needs and progress of the very few students in public care are very well known and monitored.
35. All the proper procedures for ensuring the welfare, health and safety of the students are in place. The members of the canteen staff make a significant contribution to the students' well-being by providing a wide range of food, much appreciated by the students, both before and during the school day. Arrangements for child protection are good; the designated teacher is experienced and up-to-date with local procedures. The two main members of the first aid staff, based in the science and technology departments, are fully qualified and highly experienced in providing effective care and treatment for students who feel unwell or suffer an injury or accident. Accidents are very well monitored so that adjustments are made to prevent further incidents. However, there is no suitable room for the care, treatment and vaccination of students; the current arrangements in a public space are unsatisfactory and do not meet the regulations for first-aid accommodation. The school has appropriate plans to designate and equip an office as a medical room and also to improve the staffing arrangements for first aid so that key members of staff are not required to abandon their other responsibilities in order to treat students.
36. The school is working well to encourage students to take more responsibility for their learning by reflecting on their learning styles, assessing their own and each others' achievements, and drawing out the key areas which they need to improve across all subjects. Students with special educational needs are involved in reviewing the targets on their individual education plans and setting new ones. Some good work is being done to survey younger students about their experiences at the school and action is being taken over their concerns about the amount of homework. Students from a range of ethnic backgrounds have been asked about their views as part of the school's monitoring of race issues. Older students do not feel that their views about the changes in form groupings and the new academic review arrangements were

listened to. The school council is not an effective mechanism for representing students' views and contributing to important school developments.

## **Sixth form**

37. Students are very well supported and guided as they join the sixth form, progress through their courses and move on to higher education or employment. Year 12 students are very pleased with the arrangements, such as an induction week in July, which prepares them very effectively for sixth form life. Their progress is monitored half-termly and any underachievement is swiftly identified and tackled. Guidance about post-18 options is very thorough; Year 12 students benefit from the advice which Year 13 students can give to them in their mixed form groups. Students, including those with no family experience of higher education, are highly appreciative of the guidance they receive which helps them to be successful in their university applications. Students with personal difficulties are extremely well supported by the sixth form management team, who spend many hours helping individuals overcome any barriers to what they want to achieve.
38. Because of the excellent relationships between staff and students in the sixth form, students are able to put forward their ideas and feel they are listened to. The head of sixth form is making good use of a survey and focus groups to seek students' views and explore the issues raised. Students contribute well to school developments including, for example, the complete refurbishment of the sixth form centre common room. Students' involvement in self-review and target-setting is good.

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

Links with parents, other schools and colleges are good. Links with the community are very good.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents make significant contributions to their children's achievements and to the life of the school.
- The school makes very good use of external speakers and business links to promote students' personal development, particularly in the sixth form.
- The school is developing its links with other schools well and has good contacts with universities to aid the students' progression to higher education.

## **Commentary**

39. Parents are very keen for their sons to win a place at the school and they support their children's learning and extra-curricular activities very effectively. There is a very active Parent Teacher Association which raises large sums of money for the school; these have funded some major developments, as well as supporting the extensive sports programme. The school involves parents very well if their child starts to cause any concern. Parents are given a good range of written information about the school and their children's progress. The quality of subject reports has improved considerably since the last inspection; these are now very good and consistently so across the school. Parents of students in Years 7 to 10 appreciate the new opportunity at academic review days to meet form tutors and discuss their children's targets, but they regret not being able to make direct contact with subject teachers. Some parents have concerns about aspects of communication and consultation in their dealings with the school. The school does survey parents' views but does not

always make clear what action it is taking in response to the small minority of negative opinions. It is improving its telephone systems and internal structures so that parents will have easier access to heads of school and subject departments.

40. The school has built up an outstanding resource of prestigious speakers who make an excellent contribution to the general studies programmes for Year 9 students onwards. Very good links with sports clubs considerably enhance the provision for physical education. Music, drama and modern foreign languages also benefit greatly from links with people and places beyond the school. The school is well used for adult learning courses and its new computer centre is available for local businesses to hire. The school's business links have a positive effect on careers education and vocational courses from Year 10 onwards but could be exploited further to have a greater impact on work-related learning throughout the school.
41. The school has good relationships with local schools who are working together in an informal collaboration to provide coherent pathways for students in the town. There are good systems for transfer from the feeder schools and the school arranges for primary headteachers and Year 6 teachers to check on how well their former students are progressing. Even before the award of specialist status, the school was supporting some primary schools in their mathematics and computing work and this is set to improve further. The school works closely with universities and colleges as a centre for the training of new teachers; this collaboration also benefits the development of existing staff.

## **Sixth form**

42. Parents of students in Years 12 and 13 have very good opportunities to find out about expectations in the sixth form, to meet tutors and subject staff and to keep track of their children's progress through half-termly reports. As in the main school, they are involved very well in a partnership with the school if their son or daughter is experiencing problems.
43. Provision in the sixth form benefits considerably from the school's very good community links. For example, students, especially those identified as gifted or talented, are very well challenged and extended by links with outside organisation such as the English Schools Orchestra for musicians, the use of outside coaches in physical education and visiting speakers and trips to meet those who are high achievers in their field. The excellent support of the local Rotary Club for the sixth form's Interact group enables students to gain valuable leadership skills and managerial experience in running an organisation. Links with a range of community organisations, including other schools, provide students with many opportunities for undertaking voluntary service locally, nationally and internationally. Rotary Club members conduct mock interviews with students to help prepare them for life after school. Members of staff have good links with universities so that students can obtain direct and up-to-date advice about transfer to higher education.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are very good overall. Governance is good. The leadership of the headteacher is very good; that of other key staff is good, but is very good in the sixth form. Management systems and procedures are highly effective.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is a very sharp focus, promoted by the headteacher on improving teaching, learning and achievement.
- Development planning is a valuable and effective tool for school improvement, but departmental plans vary considerably in quality.
- Procedures to monitor the work of staff are systematic, rigorous and used effectively to identify where both good practice can be shared and improvements are needed.
- There is a very clear direction for the development and improvement of the sixth form based on a thorough review of practice and a clear plan to improve further the quality of teaching and learning.
- Governors have a broad and relevant range of expertise and have helped shape the vision and direction of the school over many years.
- There is much scope to develop the leadership role of heads of department and others in middle management positions.

### **Commentary**

44. Under the astute leadership of the headteacher and the very effective contribution of the senior leadership team, the school has built successfully on its many strong features since the last inspection. Key features of management that were lacking six years ago have been introduced and implemented very effectively. These have enabled the school to focus the work of members of staff much more closely on how teaching and learning can be improved. The introduction of clear job descriptions for senior staff that focus on ensuring high quality provision has played a significant part

in this drive for improvement. There is also now a very rigorous system to evaluate assessment data and review the work of departments so that strengths can be shared while shortcomings are identified and work undertaken to eliminate them. The high quality of much of the provision in the school has meant that change could be managed gradually. In some cases the school has taken a comparatively cautious approach to implementing curriculum developments. The headteacher has been keen to ensure that changes are carefully planned and their likely impact evaluated before rushing to implementation. Consequently, provision for citizenship has been slow to develop and work-related learning is only just becoming a focus for the work of the school. The structures now in place put the school in a very strong position to secure further improvements.

45. The headteacher has introduced a very thorough system for monitoring the work of staff and departments. Regular observations of teaching on a weekly basis by the senior leadership team have enabled good practice and any shortcomings to be identified. These observations often focus on specific features of lessons so that progress in the school's plans for improving teaching and learning can be evaluated. The school also engages external consultants to review in detail the work of departments and provide plans for action. More rigorous evaluation of test and examination data has also been introduced in recent years so that the performance of subjects can be carefully analysed along with any variations in the performance of subject teachers. All of these systems have been used very effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise achievement. However, the participation of the head of department and other subject staff in these processes is limited as they are carried out largely by senior staff. The opportunity is being missed to develop the leadership role of middle management to support the drive for higher standards. This is recognised by the headteacher and forms part of the proposals to change the management structure and move towards a faculty arrangement in the immediate future.
46. Improvements in practice are based on a thorough process of development planning, which is formed around key priorities. These are largely identified on an annual basis by the senior leadership team, with governors discussing and confirming draft proposals. The governing body has an agreed plan and priorities for the improvement of the accommodation and facilities, but they have not provided a strategic direction for other areas of development. Financial planning is good and governors are starting to make improvements to their strategic planning on curricular issues. The financial implications of proposed spending are carefully modelled and underpinned by the application of best value principles. The school has also developed a very clear and carefully thought-out strategy for reducing the administrative workload of teachers.

**Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004**

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,749,011	Balance from previous year	112,212
Total expenditure	4,718,381	Balance carried forward to the next	142,842
Expenditure per student	4,209		

47. The governing body's long-term aim of high attainment, accompanied by very broad provision of extra-curricular opportunities, has enabled the school to make sustained improvements. Governors have always regarded raising achievement as their highest priority and continue to do so, with standards now well above average. They ensure

that the school fulfils most statutory duties, although they have delayed unnecessarily on providing a daily act of collective worship. They have a good grasp of the school's strengths and are aware of most weaknesses. Some governors have oversight of specific areas of the school's work, such as provision for the gifted and talented, pupils with special educational needs and business links, but the governing body does not assign a named governor to all subject departments. Sometimes a lack of first-hand evidence means that decisions rely more heavily than they need to on information provided by the school's management.

48. The school's commitment to meeting the needs of all students is demonstrated through the recent improvement in the status of the special educational needs department and its newly provided accommodation. Leadership and management of special educational needs provision is good. There is good induction and training for teaching assistants and their work now has a high standing in the school. A new recording system has been introduced to enable student progress to be tracked, but the new room has no access to records held on the school's network. There is also well planned provision for gifted and talented students that enables them to be challenged and to achieve very high standards.

### **Sixth form**

49. The leadership of sixth form provision is dynamic and highly effective. As in the main school, thorough processes are in place to evaluate the outcomes of examination results and to review the work of all staff. In response to concerns that student progress did not appear as rapid in the sixth form as in the main school, a rigorous review was carried out of provision and teaching. This has led to a three-year plan to identify what makes for high quality sixth form teaching, to provide training for the application of these features and then to monitor the effectiveness of implementation. The sixth form leader provides a model of excellent teaching of sixth form students. He has already begun to disseminate good practice and, along with other members of the senior leadership team, monitor the quality of teaching across sixth form provision. This focus is already starting to bear fruit, with many subject teachers starting to adapt their teaching to provide more challenging lessons that make the students think and participate fully.
50. The team of tutors is very effectively managed by the head of sixth form and his assistants. The organisation and day-to-day running of the sixth form is very smooth even with the limited study and social facilities. The needs of female students are given due attention, with one of the management team having responsibility for their welfare. Governors take consideration of sixth form provision in their deliberations about the school. Improvement planning at a whole-school and subject level also ensures that developments within sixth form provision are identified and carefully planned. Members of subject staff with responsibility for sixth form provision fulfil their management roles well, but as in the main school there are opportunities to develop their leadership role more fully. Financial planning of sixth form provision is very effective in ensuring cost-effectiveness. A small fall in numbers this year as the impact in the reduction of vocational provision takes effect will result in a fall in income. This is being tackled through careful financial management and active recruitment for the coming academic year. There is a very secure base from which to develop and improve sixth form provision further.

### **WORK RELATED LEARNING**

Provision for work related learning is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Work related learning experiences across the curriculum are not evaluated or monitored.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 are well supported and achieve well.
- There are good opportunities for all students in Years 8 to 10 to participate in business linked activities periodically.
- There is a well organised programme of work experience.

### **Commentary**

51. The school's vocational curriculum is very restricted. It enables work related progression for a small minority of students who follow the information and communication technology vocational course.
52. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A co-ordinator has recently been appointed with a view to extending vocational options within a more flexible curriculum in Years 10 and 11. A more co-ordinated approach of the work related provision is being developed across subject areas. Various work related skills are developed in some subjects; for example, in science, geography and business education where the work related skills of co-operation, partnership and presentations are frequently developed. In design and technology there are some valuable links with industry through visits to local companies. All students benefit from opportunities to participate in business simulations. In Year 8 a business day is organised in which with the help of a local businessman students produce and present a business plan. In Year 9, the British Airports Authority is invited to run a full day on locating a business. In Year 10 the school organises a business day where students participate in a stock market simulation. In addition, a number of nationally known outside speakers are invited through the general studies programme to talk about their work.
53. Students receive appropriate careers advice and guidance. Students follow a careers course within tutor time and attend a careers forum evening. Mock interviews are undertaken which provide very valuable preparation for entry into the world of work. All Year 11 students benefit from a work experience placement which has been carefully chosen in consultation to suit their needs. The programme is carefully structured to enable them to prepare for and reflect on their placement effectively. There is good support from the careers advisor who is effective in finding alternative career pathways for those for whom an academic sixth form is not appropriate.
54. Much of the careers focus in the sixth form is on preparation for higher education where students benefit from a well planned information booklet. Students are well supported and informed at this level, whatever the choices. Opportunities provided in the sixth form are wider including advanced vocational courses in leisure and recreation, business education and information and communication technology. In the sixth form, the Young Enterprise module which forms part of the business education programme has resulted in a very successful business scheme currently operating within the school. Business education students attend a business links dinner and gain from valuable opportunities to meet local business people.

## **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 **very good**.

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

- Teachers have excellent knowledge that often generates considerable interest and enthusiasm in the students and leads to very positive attitudes to learning.
- Assessment is used effectively to promote progress.
- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- The very effective leadership and management of the department promote a strong ethos and enthusiasm for the subject.

##### **Commentary**

55. At the end of Years 9 and 11, standards are well above average throughout the school. Year 9 test results were well above average in 2004, but were below the average of results in similar schools. Virtually all students are working at least at the level expected for their age in Years 7 to 9 and many are working well above this level. However, a small group of Year 9 students have made relatively little progress, either because of their own attitudes or more often because they have little confidence and unusually, few independent learning skills. English results at GCSE are consistently well above average and in 2004 the number of A\* and A grades was about double the average. English literature results are similar. However, students do not perform quite so well in both examinations as in their other subjects.
56. Students enter Year 7 with well above average literacy skills. By the end of Year 9, students speak confidently in lessons and to larger audiences. They listen attentively, which helps them to progress more rapidly. Their comprehension skills are very good. Many enjoy reading very much. They respond well to drama, poetry and prose. Their writing skills are not quite so far advanced. Written work is well organised and generally accurate, but more opportunities in Year 9, such as the Year 8 project, 'Writing Wrongs', could encourage more extensive writing. By the end of Year 11, students are very articulate, well able to respond effectively in debate and discussion. They know their texts thoroughly and have well developed critical skills. Their good writing skills support coursework well. In all years, students are well motivated and willing to work hard.
57. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. A feature of many lessons is sustained discussion, in which students explore and extend their understanding. Lessons are well structured, with clearly defined activities, conducted with brisk pace and challenge. Teachers know the students' learning needs very well and relationships are very good. In the best lessons, there is shared enjoyment and humour. Students work very well in pairs and groups; they generally develop independent learning habits. Homework is an integral part of lessons and is well marked. In Years 10 and 11, comments on work are specific and constructive.

Students in Years 7 to 9 understand their National Curriculum levels and what they must do to improve, but comments in their exercise books are not always so specific. Students with special educational needs make similarly good progress as others because work focuses well on their specific targets.

58. Weekly lunchtime activities such as debating and the discussion of books are enjoyed by the students. The assessment policy is in place and enabling teachers to track progress more closely. It is identifying students who are not moving forward as rapidly as others. The department recognises that the schemes of work in Years 7 and 8 need further revision and greater challenge. The department has a committed team of specialist teachers, some of whom trained within it. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards, achievement, attitudes and the quality of teaching and learning have all remained good.

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

59. Students enter Year 7 with very well developed literacy skills, which are above average throughout the school. These support their learning very well in all years. In most subjects, students progress in understanding of ideas by discussion in small or larger groups. Their very good listening skills ensure that they attend to discussion and their responses develop it further. These qualities accelerate progress in English and modern foreign languages particularly. Their comprehension skills are very good. Most departments ensure that keywords are always understood and used. The English department encourages a wide range of both fiction and non-fiction reading for pleasure, which is supported by reading lists, discussions and debates. Though borrowing figures are not high, the library is well used. Writing is not quite so well developed on entry and, though very good standards are achieved by the end of Year 11, it could be tackled more vigorously in some subjects. Opportunities for extended writing could be provided more frequently in subjects such as science, art and design and religious education. The work of the English and modern foreign language teachers, assisted by careful correction of errors in most other subjects helps students write accurately. At the moment the school has succeeded in embedding good practice into almost all departments.

### **Modern foreign languages**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- All students achieve very well and the achievement of the more able is excellent.
- Most teachers use the foreign language all the time so that students gain valuable experience.
- All students are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- The department is very well led and managed.

### **Commentary**

60. GCSE examination results in 2004 in French were very high. They were well above average in both German and Spanish. Standards observed during the inspection were well above the national average in French and above in both the other languages. Results compare particularly well with the national average figures for

boys and achievement in all three languages is very good. Attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2004 in modern foreign languages was well above the national average. Standards observed during the inspection in Year 9 are variable, but overall are above the national average. Achievement varies according to the ability levels of each group of students, but is very good overall. The achievement of higher ability students is excellent in Years 7 to 9.

61. Students throughout the main school learn very well in all three languages because the teaching is very good in all age groups. All lessons are very well timed, with fast pace and a wide variety of activity. Teachers deploy the foreign language assistants very well, adjusting the subject matter of lessons to interest all the students. Teachers use assessment skilfully to support learning. Students in Years 7 to 9 know their current National Curriculum level and what they need to do to improve. Students in Years 10 and 11 are aware of their predicted GCSE grade and of how to achieve it. Most teachers use the foreign language all the time, but this is not entirely consistent and is less common with groups of middle and lower ability. Sometimes teachers do not adapt learning material to meet the different needs of students in their class.
62. The head of modern languages oversees the whole department, ensuring consistency of policy across all three languages and establishing a clear model of very good teaching practice. Three heads of subject manage the work in each of the modern languages taught in the department and this works well, giving each language an identity. Most teachers follow policies and approaches to teaching consistently. For example, all teachers mark in a similar fashion, keeping students aware of their progress and expectations. The department maintains good records showing how well students progress and demonstrating the value added overall, but has not analysed in detail the value added in each of the three different languages. The department organises the extensive programme of visits and exchanges with great skill and commitment, making a very positive impact on students' achievement. The department has improved very well since the last inspection. Standards in all age groups are now well above average.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good relationships between teachers and students considerably aid learning.
- Teachers' high expectations ensure appropriate challenge in lessons.
- Assessment is used very well to encourage learning.
- The use of new technology to aid teaching and learning has only recently become a feature of the department's work.

### **Commentary**

63. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. Already well above average test and examination results have improved further in line with the national trend. Both in work seen and in examination performance, standards are well above average across the school. Achievement is good through out the school. The most able students are achieving their potential. Students of lowest ability in the school are being challenged to attempt intermediate level GCSE, with many being successful. Books contain good quantities of well-presented, regularly marked work at challenging

levels of difficulty. For example, the most able Year 9 students can use trigonometry successfully, while low ability sets in the school are working at levels normally associated with those of average standards. Year 9 test results have been consistently well above average over time. GCSE results in 2004 were also well above average, and a quarter of the cohort gained A\* and A grades.

64. Students have very good attitudes to their studies. They listen attentively; they work well and are reliable about homework. As a result their learning is good. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. There is a policy of very small groups for the least able. Where support is available it is used very effectively to ensure full inclusion in the lessons. As a result students with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers.
65. Teaching is good across the school. Very good relationships in lessons, with quiet but firm class control help to establish an expectation of high standards. Appropriate use is made of starter and review activities, although teaching styles observed tended to be fairly traditional but well employed. However, a greater variety in the activities planned could support the department's good attempts outside the classroom to develop students' interest and enjoyment of the subject. The use of new technology is at present very limited although there is clear evidence that plans to rectify this are beginning to have an impact on practice. Assessment is used to promote progress very well. Teachers know the students well: they assess progress throughout lessons and adjust their approach as appropriate. Students are aware of their levels and target grades. Progress towards those grades is tested regularly.
66. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department is a good role model. He is committed to high standards which he communicates through well run department meetings. Appropriate efforts are made to overcome the difficulties in recruiting staff. A good team has been developed who are very supportive of one another and contribute to development planning. There is a well-organised work scheme that is regularly reviewed to provide the best opportunities for student success. Good work is being done with the feeder primary schools. Elements of the teaching are monitored by senior staff, but the lack of a planned programme of lesson observations and feedback by the head of department limits the opportunities to widen the range and variety of teaching methods and share good practice.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

67. Mathematical skills are well above average overall. Students handle basic number work confidently. Teachers across the curriculum can rely on students being able to cope well with the mathematical content of their subject. Progress in those subjects benefits as a result. Staff awareness of the issue of promoting mathematical skills in other subjects has been raised through training. A successful 'Mathematics and Business' day has been held with a 'Mathematics and Geography' day planned. An audit of mathematical content across the curriculum has been carried out. However, no other efforts have been made to cause curriculum areas to plan with good mathematical skills in mind, either to raise standards in the subject concerned or to develop the mathematical skills further.

### **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average throughout the school, although the proportion of the very highest grades in Year 9 tests and at GCSE is relatively low.
- Teaching and learning are good, supporting the students in making good progress and achieving well.
- The students' attitudes and behaviour are good and they willingly engage in the process of learning.

## Commentary

68. The proportion of students reaching both Level 5 and Level 6 in the end of Year 9 tests in 2004 was well above both the national average and results in schools whose students had similar prior attainment in Year 6 tests. The proportion of students reaching the higher Level 7 was not quite as high, being above national and similar school comparisons. Nevertheless, the overall results represent good student achievement through Years 7 to 9. The proportion of A\*-C grades at GCSE was also well above the national average in 2004, although the proportion of the highest A\* grades was relatively low in biology. Students did better than in the average of their other subjects in physics, broadly but significantly below in the double award science. However, these results again represent good student achievement from their prior attainment in Year 9.
69. These high standards have been maintained since the previous inspection. The school has recognised the need to increase the proportion of highest levels in Year 9 and grades in Year 11, although inspection evidence shows that higher-attaining students throughout the school are currently being appropriately challenged. Students in all year groups are achieving well and those with special educational needs receive effective additional support to enable them to do so too.
70. Students achieve well because they engage with their learning and respond well to good teaching. Teaching and learning are good in a high proportion of lessons, with some exemplary practice being evident. The best lessons are conducted at a good pace and with rigour, but remain focused on maximising student learning. Lessons are mostly well structured, identifying systematically what students know and can do and then building on this carefully through effective demonstration, questioning or experimentation. Many lessons provide a tight and secure framework within which students are expected to take increasing responsibility for their own learning. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and students rise to this challenge well.
71. Some high quality written feedback for students is also evident, including targets for improvement, although this is not consistent across the whole teaching team. Student response to this feedback, showing corrected work, improved presentation or recognising when targets have been met, is less evident. There is some effective use of new technology, including the use of interactive whiteboards, which enhances learning and is visually stimulating. Students are also encouraged to research using the internet and there are some opportunities to capture and analyse physical data, although this aspect is under-developed at present. The positive impact of the national strategy for developing teaching and learning is evident, but not especially widespread at present.

72. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Good provision and high standards have been maintained since the previous inspection as a result of good leadership and management. Increased monitoring and tracking of student performance is enabling the team to focus interventions where they will have most impact. Evaluation of the strengths and required developments for the subject is generally accurate, although this is insufficiently based on direct monitoring of lessons. Although the quality of teaching is secure, there remains some inconsistency between individual teachers and across subjects. There is good capacity for sustained improvement, which could be achieved more effectively by striving to spread the very best practice across the whole team.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is very good and consequently examination results and current standards are well above average in Year 11.
- The number of computers is above average but students have to share computers in lessons in Years 7 to 9.
- In some lessons in Years 7 to 9 there is insufficient emphasis on meeting the needs of individual students.
- Members of staff work very effectively as a team and benefit from leadership and management that is sharply focused on ensuring continued improvements in achievement.

### **Commentary**

73. Improvement in provision and standards since the last inspection is very good. GCSE results in 2004 improved further with over 90 percent attaining A\*-C grades and all students passing the examination as they did in 2003. These results represented very good achievement for the students.
74. Performance in lessons and work samples in Years 7 to 9 indicate that standards are very mixed in the early part of Year 7. However, achievement is good and by Year 9 standards are above average. Some Year 9 students were able to demonstrate very good skills and knowledge when they planned and constructed a sophisticated database. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are good. The course is well planned, as are individual lessons. The choice of resources ensures that activities are challenging and interesting. However, in some lessons the brisk pace and challenging content were not necessarily appropriate for lower-attaining students and some did not make appropriate progress during whole-class teaching sessions. More individual attention was often available as the lesson progressed, which helped to improve achievement. Some of the rooms used for teaching these year groups require the sharing of computers, which makes the teacher's task more difficult in ensuring individuals work at an appropriate level.
75. All students follow a short GCSE examination course in Years 10 and 11 in a timetabled lesson. Many students convert this to a full examination course by covering additional content in class and attending teaching sessions after school. Particularly well-constructed and imaginative Web pages were much in evidence and some database work was impressive. Achievement is very good in both courses,

particularly for those taking the full GCSE. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is very good. The information and communication technology specialists are very adept at managing the combination of full and short courses successfully. Suitably challenging tasks are available to stretch the whole ability range. Relationships between teachers and students and within classes are very constructive so that learning takes place in a very productive and supportive working environment. Assessment is very thorough and students receive detailed feedback, which helps them to improve. The very good learning resources are also available for students to use at home via the Internet.

76. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Good arrangements have been made to ensure that the flexible curriculum works to the advantage of all students. Best use is made of the resources available to the department, which have been increased significantly. They include a good number of interactive whiteboards, which are used very effectively by teachers, although students were not often involved in using them to demonstrate ideas or work to their peers. An impressive new teaching space is very well equipped with computers and whiteboards but the open-plan nature of the area can inhibit class teaching, especially the use of effective review sessions at the end of lessons.

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

77. The use of information and communication technology across the curriculum is good overall, although there remain some significant variations between departments. Students have good or very good opportunities to develop their capability in all years through discrete information and communication technology courses. The course in Years 7 to 9 ensures that they have good skills and knowledge, which can be put to good use to enhance learning across the curriculum. Information and communication technology competence improves to a very good level in wide range of applications in Years 10 and 11. Most subjects take advantage of this and of the increased level of resources, which are now available throughout the school. However, there is still more scope for most departments to develop use further.
78. The installation of interactive whiteboards is having a significant impact in many subjects, although the interactive functions are not always exploited fully by involving students directly in creating or demonstrating work in whole class sessions. Almost the entire curriculum has been audited for information and communication technology use and a comprehensive map is developing which is helping to inform planning, although in science there are some weak aspects which the department is currently improving. The use of information and communication technology is very good in modern foreign languages and in geography and is good in many other areas. However, the citizenship provision has not been audited for the use of new technology and there is inadequate use of information and communication technology in art and design.

## HUMANITIES

### Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers successfully motivate and engage the students so that they are fully involved in their learning.
- Teachers prepare lessons to cater for a wide variety of learning styles.
- New technology is used very effectively in the majority of lessons to enrich the learning experience.

#### Commentary

79. Attainment recorded by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2004 was in line with national averages. However, this was because teachers set tasks for assessment purposes which did not enable students to access higher levels of attainment. This has been rectified. Standards now are above average by Year 9 because teachers set tasks which enable students to achieve higher levels. Students achieve well in Years 7 to 9 by responding well to constant challenge and using opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively to increase their knowledge and understanding. Overall teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9. Students are very well motivated because of the interesting way in which teachers plan and use resources so that students are actively engaged. Students have to think hard because they are involved in decision-making. Those with special educational needs achieve well because resources are often adapted well to assist them. The achievement of gifted and talented students is often good. For example, students have to adopt a particular viewpoint on an issue, which enables higher attaining students to think more critically.
80. GCSE results in 2004 were high. Students' performance at the highest A\* and A grades was double the national average and better than in many other school subjects. Standards of work seen at this level are well above average and achievement is very good due to the extra challenge provided in some lessons; students have to think and write at higher levels because of the demands placed upon them. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 10 and 11, where teachers are enthusiastic, stimulating and constantly challenging. Every opportunity is used to place the emphasis on students thinking and answering for themselves. In these lessons students make better progress than might be expected. Teachers also bring lessons alive by practical demonstrations in which students can participate.
81. Teachers and students make very good use of new technology through the frequent use of lap top computers in lessons as well as the effective use of interactive whiteboards. Good contributions to literacy skills are made, such as in story writing on migration. Good contributions to numeracy skills are shown in graphical work on indicators of economic development. Students benefit from extensive fieldwork opportunities both local and long distance. Teachers mark work so that students gain a good understanding of how they can improve; this is a considerable improvement since the last inspection. Assessment influences the way teachers plan which results in a greater variety of tasks and more challenging research based assessments.

82. Overall leadership and management are good. The department is self-evaluative, monitors performance data well and has made changes where necessary. This is an ably led team of forward thinking and dedicated staff. Schemes of work have been re-written with the aim of making learning more active for students. The subject development plan is focusing on further key areas for development such as the improvement of lesson summaries and greater challenge for the more able. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have improved and shortcomings tackled successfully. Accommodation and resources have improved with better sized classrooms which are well equipped.

## History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have regularly been well above average with a significant proportion of A\* grades.
- Very good teaching enables students to achieve very well.
- There are insufficient opportunities to investigate historical features of the local environment.
- Students have very positive attitudes and thoroughly enjoy the subject.

## Commentary

83. GCSE results for all grades have been well above the national average for the past two years, with a good improving trend in 2004, especially in the higher grades. Results in 2004 were above those of other subjects in the school, with a significant proportion of A\* grades. Each student's attainment, in work seen during the inspection, is, without exception, above average. This reflects the very good standard of teaching that develops students' critical and writing skills at every opportunity, leading to very good achievement. Students at all levels of attainment can interpret source material perceptively and express the conclusions they have drawn both verbally and in well-reasoned essays.
84. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average. Students come into the school with an average level of historical knowledge and they achieve very well in the development of skills and historical understanding from Year 7 to Year 9. This is because their teachers challenge them to think for themselves and strive to make their lessons rich and enjoyable. Students with special educational needs are known to their teachers and achieve well as a result of the individual help they are given. However, in some classes not enough consideration is given to providing work that would suit their differing learning needs.
85. Overall the standard of teaching and learning is very good. Some excellent teaching used role-play to draw the students into a situation where they could not help but perceive the motives of the participants in the Versailles peace talks and react very strongly to the way various countries were treated. Group work and discussion fostered independent thinking and social development, and ensured that all students participated in the progress of lessons. In some lessons in Years 7 to 9, there was a tendency to slow pacing that led to students' attention wandering and to teachers not having time to assess learning fully through questioning at the end of the lesson. The best teaching was supported by the use of new technology and video extracts which

emphasised teaching points and engaged students' interest. The curriculum is effectively underpinned by visits to places like Germany and Russia. However, opportunities are missed to use the local environment as a basis for historical investigations.

86. The department carries out regular formal assessments in line with the school policy and uses the outcomes effectively to plan further teaching. All students are aware of their current and target levels and grades; thorough and regular marking practices inform them of what they need to do to improve. The majority of students have excellent attitudes to their work and their teachers, and thoroughly enjoy the subject. However, there were occasions when comparative inattention by a few students affected the learning of the rest of the group, although this was swiftly and effectively dealt with.
87. The recent illness of the head of department resulted in a member of the senior management team acting as head of department for the inspection. This situation has not been allowed to interfere with the smooth running of the department, which indicates that very good leadership and management are in place. Good improvement since the last inspection has led to rising standards of attainment and teaching, and better assessment procedures. This is a dynamic department led with vision and commitment.

## **Religious education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A consistent high level of teaching is enabling most students to achieve very well.
- Students are encouraged to give their views on issues.
- The wide range of visits and visiting speakers enhance the curriculum.
- Inconsistencies, especially in marking, do not always give students clear guidance on what needs to be improved and how to do it.

### **Commentary**

88. Students join the school with knowledge; skills and understanding that are variable but overall in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good. Standards are well above the expectations of the agreed syllabus by Year 9. The students give their own views on issues and have a secure knowledge of aspects of Christianity and a number of world religions. Standards are average and achievement in the core course is satisfactory with Year 10 covering more material than Year 11. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2004 in the full course were significantly above the national average and students did better in religious education than in their other subjects. Students use their knowledge to discuss ideas and empathise with various situations. They are maintaining the achievement levels of earlier years and so achievement is very good.
89. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons have a vitality that stimulates the students' interest and encourages them to express their views. This vitality also contributes to the very good attitudes to religious education and contributes to the students making very good progress. Members of staff make very good use of current world and local affairs and use the experience and expertise of the students to

complement the teaching. There is an emphasis on the students' participation. Consequently they feel confident when discussing their views. The curriculum is enhanced by visits to places of worship and speakers who bring a variety of challenges to the students. However, there are some inconsistencies in the marking of the students' books where the use of constructive comments is variable and so students are not always clear about what is needed to raise their attainment level. Teachers know the students well and offer suitable support, but in some lessons tasks are not set that are suitable to the varying ability levels of the students.

90. The leadership and management of the department are very good in spite of these inconsistencies. The staff team work closely together, are very good role models and have raised the profile of the subject so that it is recognised as one worthy of study. Non-specialist teachers are well supported. Although the school now meets the requirement of providing religious education for all students, the time allocated to the core is still slightly below that recommended by the agreed syllabus. This slows the rate of achievement of students who then do not reach the standards that they might. A large number of rooms are used for the teaching of religious education. This means on some occasions that resources are not available to enhance answers in response to students' questions and the students' work is not displayed. Since the last inspection there has been a rise in standards, the uptake at GCSE has risen; teaching and learning have improved, the school now meets statutory requirements and the subject is making wider contribution to school life. This represents very good improvement.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- The strong focus on practical work, manufacturing skills and design process, effectively supports students' learning and achievement.
- Stimulating design projects, recently introduced, motivate students well, improving their skills and resulting in high standards of attainment for most students.
- Students' attitudes to learning are positive; they enjoy the subject and are proud of their work, which supports good learning and achievement.

#### **Commentary**

91. Achievement is good overall. Students enter the school with a diverse range of experiences in design and technology and standards are below the national average. Standards are broadly in line with the national average by Year 9 and above the national average by Year 11. Throughout Years 7 to 9, work seen indicates rapidly developing skills, confidence and competence. In Years 10 and 11 teaching continues to focus on the design process and accuracy in manufacture, work seen indicates sophistication in the use of the design process and a high degree of accuracy and finish in products and models produced. GCSE results are significantly above the national average and have been maintained since last inspection. Teaching is good, with examples of very good teaching. Lessons are well organised, resourced and taught at a brisk pace. Individual support for students, including those with special educational needs, is very good, and aids learning and achievement very effectively.

92. Teachers' high expectations, subject knowledge, technical expertise, behaviour management and workshop organisation support students' independent learning very effectively. Teachers challenge students intellectually and creatively, using appropriate questioning skills to ensure students understand what they are learning. The teaching of information and communication technology, literacy and numeracy is satisfactory overall, but not always clearly identified in lesson planning. In units of work, which have specific information technology focus, this aspect is well taught by teachers; they have good knowledge and skills and manage the limited resources skilfully. The students' skills are well developed which enables them to use new technology as a tool to support their learning effectively. Students' learning is good; they enjoy lessons, take an active interest and are keen to finish their work to a high standard. Throughout the school, the highest attaining students complete additional work of their own accord, adding breadth and depth to well presented folders and design portfolios.
93. Leadership and management are both good. The new head of department has high expectations, leads by example and clearly values the work of teachers, the technician and students. He has ensured that planning and assessment procedures are satisfactory. Members of staff work very well as a team to ensure that the quality of learning experience for students continues to improve. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have been maintained and remain significantly above the national average, and the statutory requirements are now met.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

94. Art and design and music were inspected in detail and some drama lessons were also sampled. **Drama** is well established in Years 7 to 9, but the GCSE course has just begun in Year 10. In the Year 8 and Year 10 lessons seen, standards were well above average and achievement was very good. Students in Year 8 developed scripts for specific purposes such as a radio play, and added additional effects skilfully. They worked very closely together and their very good speaking and listening skills enabled them to evaluate one another's work well. Students in Year 10 have good technical vocabulary and understand the use of space and movement. All students enjoy drama very much and are highly motivated. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers incorporate much challenge into lessons but also ensure that activities are adapted so that students of all abilities can succeed. The new accommodation offers a very good environment for learning and is much appreciated and respected by the students.

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards of drawing, painting and printmaking are above average.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use practical demonstrations well to ensure all students understand.
- Marking criteria are not used to inform students clearly about their areas of strength and weakness.
- There are not enough opportunities for whole groups to use computers to develop ideas creatively.

- The quality of leadership and management of the department has not been sufficient to produce satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

## Commentary

95. According to teacher assessments in 2004, Year 9 students were working above expectation. This was supported by work seen during the inspection. The percentage of students achieving A\*-C at GCSE in 2004 was above the average. However, students did less well in art than in other subjects they took. There were fewer A\* grades than nationally and fewer than in other subjects at the school.
96. Standards and achievement have shown a downward trend falling from 100 percent GCSE pass rate in recent years to around 60 percent in 2004. This can partly be attributed to staff instability. However, unsatisfactory leadership and management does not sufficiently support inexperienced teachers in the department and does not clearly outline strategies that will raise achievement and standards, especially the number of A\* grades at GCSE.
97. Standards of drawing, painting and printmaking are above average, with some extremely competent work being produced by higher-attaining students; however, the quality of written work and work using sculptural materials is not as high. Written work is usually given as homework, resulting in some students not being given the necessary support and guidance, especially in Years 7 to 9, to achieve well in this area. Presentation is better when the students use computers, which many do if they have access to equipment. Work in three-dimensions and using computers is not exploited extensively and yet it has been found in national research that these are areas in which boys particularly excel. Some higher-attaining students in Year 11 successfully use specialist software to develop ideas and to improve the quality of their presentation. One student even has his own website showing his artwork. However, many rely on equipment they have at home to do this. Students are not offered opportunities to do this as part of their art lessons, leading to unequal provision.
98. Achievement for all students, including those with special educational needs, is satisfactory as a result of generally satisfactory teaching. Students arrive with skills that vary but are broadly above average. By the end of Year 9 according to work seen during the inspection, most students are working above the level of expectation, having made gradual progress in improving their skills, knowledge and understanding. By the end of Year 11 most students are working above the national average with some gifted and talented students working well above average. Teachers are specialists and use practical demonstrations well to ensure all students learn techniques well and appreciate how the work of famous artists relates to students' own work. Boys are conscientious and hard working and these very good attitudes contribute positively to their learning. Teachers do not use assessment criteria regularly enough or in enough detail to clearly point out to students their areas of strength and weakness, nor do they check learning at the start and end of lessons. As a result, students do not develop as independent learners and teachers' planning is not sufficiently detailed to meet the needs of all students.
99. The art department makes a satisfactory contribution to students' social skills, through mixed year clubs at lunchtime and after school, and cultural development by studying the work of artists both here and abroad. Work from other cultures could be more widely promoted right through from Years 7 to 11 through trips to galleries and

museums, which would inspire and inform students' own work. Students' work is shown throughout the school in striking displays that enhance the school environment.

## Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Music is a popular GCSE option and results are outstanding, due to highly motivating teaching.
- Excellent extra-curricular provision makes a significant contribution to raising standards and to students' personal development.
- Teaching styles in Year 7 to 9 do not meet the learning needs of lower-attaining students consistently.

### Commentary

100. Students' achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 largely because the teaching in these year groups is very good. GCSE results in 2004 were very high, in line with a well-established trend of results in the school. A very high proportion - one in five - of Year 11 students opted for the GCSE course. Standards in Year 11 are well above average. Students listen analytically, with a very good understanding of musical techniques and styles. Many are very able performers and their compositions, drawn from the full range of prescribed styles, often show marked originality. Some students' work is less assured, but musical nonetheless.
101. Students' achievement, including that of students with special educational needs, is good in Years 7 to 9 where teaching is good. Talented instrumentalists achieve very well. The achievement of lower-attaining students is less strong, as teaching too often assumes that they can follow tasks suited to the majority of the class without the extra guidance that these students need. In Year 9, standards are well above average overall. Many exploit the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, already becoming very able performers. Eight students are selected on entry each year on the basis of their musical aptitude. The very strong ethos for music in the school ensures that all Year 9 students have a good knowledge of music from a range of different times and cultures, and at least a basic grasp of musical notation. Most are able to hold parts accurately when making music in groups. Lower-attaining students identify mood and intention well in music, but do not articulate well how these are brought about. Higher-attaining students are very skilled in the arts of improvisation and performance.
102. Students in Years 7 to 9 learn well in class, as the sequencing of lessons and homework is very well planned. Routines are well established, helping keep occasional restless behaviour in check. Constructive relations between teachers and students lead to good collaboration in practical activities. Good assessment practice helps students to know how well they are doing and how to improve. However, when students work with headphones at keyboards the monitoring of students' progress is inconsistent, particularly when classes are large and space is tight. The use of new technology is well integrated into lessons, although the amount of equipment used varies from teacher to teacher. In Years 10 and 11, students learn very well as the teachers' expert subject knowledge is expressed more freely, creating a mutually

stimulating musical environment with the students. The quality of discussion is much more open and key vocabulary is much better consolidated.

103. The subject is very well led and managed, with strong team spirit and sense of purpose. Organisation of the instrumental tuition for numbers far exceeding the average is excellent, incorporating a two-week competitive music festival, a very wide range of high quality ensembles and productions, and numerous opportunities for performance. Long-standing, mutually beneficial collaboration with the Yamaha Music School is one of a good range of links to the local community. Since the last inspection the subject has improved its provision well.

#### **Example of outstanding practice**

**In a Year 11 lesson, students were introduced to the principles of sub-Saharan rhythmic music in an engaging, illuminating and spiritually rewarding fashion.**

After a very well structured discussion and appraisal of a recorded excerpt of music, students had a clear grasp of the multi-layered rhythmic construction of sub-Saharan music. Students' motivation was such that they sang an African song taught by rote, against which rhythmic percussion parts were introduced to give a sense of 'authentic' performance. The clear mix and match of knowledge, skill and aural perception were further developed in group work, each group being led by an experienced student drummer and supported by excellent guidance from the teacher. Rather than conclude this with groups performing to the class, the groups were skilfully linked together into one continuous performance, so that the students experienced the whole as genuine communal music-making, raising their aural involvement to a higher plane and developing the strong spiritual bond of sharing the experience 'from the inside' of the music.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

### **Physical education**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Recent teacher changes are being managed well and the quality of provision maintained, although there are areas that are in need of improvement.
- Extra-curricular teams and clubs are extensive and enthusiastically taken up by students.
- Students have a positive attitude to physical education; they work productively and co-operatively in lessons.
- Very good on-site accommodation is complemented with superb offsite games fields.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 does not include any accredited courses.

### **Commentary**

104. The department has recently undergone a complete change of teaching staff. This has presented the new head of department with a number of significant challenges. These include leading a new, inexperienced teaching team, maintaining the school's deservedly high reputation for success with school teams and developing the curriculum to provide a more balanced provision which meets the needs of all students. This transitional period has been handled well although there is still much to do, particularly in developing the curriculum. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Whilst the school now meets statutory requirements for teaching the required National Curriculum aspects, students receive less than the recommended two hours of timetabled physical education in Years 7 to 11. However, the provision of and participation in extra-curricular clubs, teams and the extensive

inter-house activities is excellent, with up to 25 per cent of students participating in school fixtures at any one time. There is a well established sports study A Level course in the sixth form which students achieve well in, but no GCSE or other accredited courses are offered for Years 10 and 11 to build on the progress that students make in previous years and to provide a natural progression through to the sixth form.

105. Students enter the school with a wide range of sporting ability but make good progress and achieve well by the end of Year 9, with the majority working at the level expected nationally. The more able and talented students attain beyond this particularly in rugby, cricket and football. Standards overall are average by Year 9. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is also good. The standard of work seen in lessons observed is average by Year 11. However, again the more able students in Years 10 and 11 achieve well, particularly those representing the school games teams where many go on to achieve county and occasionally national honours. More robust assessment procedures are now in place for monitoring and evaluating student performance against National Curriculum levels and students are now made aware of their attainment levels and what they need to do to improve. There are plans to include a standardisation process to ensure that all teachers assess accurately and consistently in line with the National Curriculum requirements and provide more realistic assessments of student attainment levels.
106. Teaching and learning are good. Members of staff teach very well prepared lessons which include interesting and progressive skills practices. Where these are taught enthusiastically and focus on clear learning outcomes linked to relevant and simple teaching points, students achieve well. For example, in a very good Year 8 rugby lesson students worked productively and co-operatively and improved their support and passing skills. Students have a very positive attitude to physical education and participate with commitment in and out of lessons, as observed in a good Year 11 basketball lesson developing their refereeing and organisational skills as well as their team play.
107. The subject is well led and managed, with the head of department setting high expectations in terms of performance, participation, behaviour and kit. The development plan is comprehensive but not sharply focused enough on the priorities of curriculum development, embedding good practice in teaching and learning and integrating cross-curricular themes. The schemes of work have now been comprehensively revised and this has provided a good foundation for lesson planning. The very good accommodation on site is supplemented with superb off-site facilities but these are under-used, being only available for fixtures and extra-curricular activities.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

108. No subject in this area was inspected in depth, although lessons were observed in **business studies** in Years 10 and 11. There was very good teaching in one Year 11 lesson, which was leading to very good achievement and above average standards as the students learnt about cash flow forecasting. A Year 10 lesson on the differences between jobs and flow production was also well taught and the students achieved well.

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

109. Citizenship was inspected in depth and lessons of personal, social and health education were also observed. Provision for **personal, social and health education** is good. The programme for students in Years 7 and 8 includes work on settling into school, where the mixed grouping enables older students to support the younger ones well. Students are consulted by questionnaire about the parts of the programme they have found most useful and which areas they would like developed further. The programme for mixed Year 9, 10 and 11 groups is comprehensive and extends work undertaken in the lower school, as well as work experience, looking at options and careers. Structured sessions by the school nurse for Years 8, 10 and 12 enable issues related to sex education, sexuality and relationships to be covered frankly and openly. Informative sessions on drug use and abuse are provided by a theatre company for students in Years 8 and 9.

## **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Recent rapid improvements have been made to ensure that National Curriculum requirements are met; however, the school council is ineffective and does not model democracy satisfactorily.
- Careful planning has ensured that citizenship will be covered by specialist teachers and specific schemes of work are being written to ensure all required aspects are covered.
- Students are becoming well informed citizens through acquiring a good knowledge and understanding of issues, although they are not always aware that they are studying citizenship.
- A wide range of high profile speakers visits the school each year to inform students about current events and issues.
- Assessment procedures do not monitor the students' progress in relation to developing skills in all areas and reporting on achievement and attainment in Years 7 to 10 has not yet taken place.

## **Commentary**

110. Satisfactory leadership and management have enabled citizenship to undergo rapid recent reorganisation so that it is now at a satisfactory stage and meets the National Curriculum requirements. Standards are above average throughout the school. Students are taught citizenship in Years 7 to 9 through lessons in religious studies, English, history and geography. Students in Year 10 and 11 are taught citizenship as part of their general studies course, by teachers from a range of subjects. As yet citizenship has not been reported to parents, but very good quality reports have been written for Year 11 and will be sent out soon. The reports for other years are planned in a similar format and will be sent to parents as part of this year's reports for Years 7 to 10.
111. In Years 7 to 9 lessons are taught by specialist teachers and the teaching is very good. Students achieve very well overall in their lessons. By the end of Year 9, they have developed understanding of the way the media and television influence perceptions and look at different religions and ethnic identities and the need for mutual respect and understanding. They all record their participation in charity and community work, such as taking part in Red Nose Day and sponsored events. The

recent introduction of the use of stickers for students in Years 7 to 9 enables the students to recognise citizenship units.

112. The teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good and the achievement of students is good. By the end of Year 11, students have good knowledge and understanding of discrimination and prejudice and can relate this to their environment. They are able to present their ideas well orally and debate issues very well. However, students are not always aware that they are studying aspects of citizenship.
113. There are some examples of outstanding teaching for students of all ages. In the best lessons, teaching about becoming an informed citizen is linked to the work students have done across the curriculum. Teachers are knowledgeable and there is a high level of challenge provided. However, the school council is not effective and does not teach students about the working of the democratic process adequately. Many of the tutor groups do not use the election process to select their representative. The experience of students of all ages is enhanced by the wide range of outside speakers who visit the school and share their knowledge of current events and issues. Although the coverage of citizenship is monitored and students self assess what they have learned and any community activities they have taken part in, there is a lack of ongoing teacher assessment of the skills of enquiry and communication and participation and responsible action.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2004.

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	7	85.7	78.3	42.9	21.6	41.4	28.5
Biology	18	55.6	63.5	0.0	10.4	12.8	19.8
Business studies	6	83.3	75.3	33.3	15.4	33.3	25.7
Chemistry	10	70.0	70.3	20.0	13.2	21.0	23.0
Classical studies	1	100.0	89.1	100.0	36.0	60.0	36.5
Drama	5	80.0	86.6	0.0	19.8	24.0	30.9
Economics	3	66.7	71.6	0.0	18.6	20.0	25.8
English literature	14	100.0	86.2	0.0	17.4	22.9	29.7
French	5	100.0	79.8	0.0	19.4	30.0	28.2
Design and technology	7	85.7	72.6	14.3	13.9	32.9	24.3
Geography	11	90.9	75.5	27.3	20.4	32.7	27.0
German	2	50.0	81.6	0.0	18.8	20.0	28.8
History	24	87.5	82.2	25.0	20.8	31.7	29.2
Information technology	5	80.0	66.6	40.0	8.8	30.0	20.6
Mathematics	17	76.5	59.9	5.9	14.1	22.9	20.5
Music	1	100.0	79.8	100.0	16.9	50.0	27.5
Other sciences	16	75.0	67.4	6.3	14.8	21.9	22.8

Other social studies	8	75.0	67.8	0.0	15.1	17.5	23.2
Physics	10	60.0	66.4	0.0	14.8	19.0	22.4
Spanish	5	80.0	77.1	0.0	17.0	26.0	26.5
Sports/PE studies	11	90.9	72.2	9.1	11.8	30.0	22.8

### **Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	14	100.0	98.3	35.7	50.2	78.6	87.1
Biology	25	100.0	96.6	44.0	40.0	76.8	79.3
Business studies	24	100.0	98.9	45.8	39.4	80.8	81.8
Chemistry	14	100.0	97.7	71.4	50.0	91.4	85.7
Classical studies	2	100.0	99.6	50.0	58.1	90.0	92.8
Drama	11	100.0	99.6	36.4	42.8	85.5	85.1
Economics	4	100.0	98.8	75.0	54.3	100.0	89.8
English literature	37	100.0	99.4	59.5	44.9	90.3	85.5
French	10	100.0	99.0	70.0	53.1	100.0	88.9
Design and technology	16	100.0	97.8	31.3	35.0	80.0	77.9
Geography	21	100.0	98.8	52.4	46.4	85.7	85.2
German	7	100.0	98.6	42.9	49.6	85.7	86.3
History	37	100.0	99.0	73.0	45.6	102.7	85.1
Information technology	11	100.0	96.3	36.4	25.7	81.8	71.1
Mathematics	42	100.0	96.8	52.4	56.6	89.5	89.5
Music	11	100.0	98.2	54.5	37.1	90.9	79.5
Other sciences	33	100.0	97.4	48.5	44.2	87.3	82.5
Other social studies	15	100.0	97.4	73.3	42.5	94.7	81.6
Physics	28	100.0	96.7	46.4	45.3	84.3	82.6
Religious studies	12	100.0	99.1	100.0	49.5	113.3	87.4
Spanish	3	100.0	98.2	33.3	53.5	73.3	88.7
Sports/PE studies	24	100.0	97.8	25.0	30.9	72.5	75.4

### **Level 2 vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business VCE	49	91.8	91.6	6.2	24.1	61.0	67.9
Information technology VQ	36	100.0	88.3	22.5	26.9	80.3	67.8

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

114. English and French were inspected in depth. One lesson was also observed in each of German, Latin and Spanish.

115. The one Year 12 lesson of **German** observed was judged as excellent as was the students' achievement because the material was interesting and relevant. The teacher insisted that all discussion took place in German and encouraged the students to express themselves clearly. Standards in this class were average. Most students knew the basic vocabulary very well and were able to manipulate the grammar successfully; however, they still had some way to go in order to feel comfortable with higher level vocabulary.
116. The **Latin** lesson was very well taught and the Year 12 students' achievement was very good. There was an extremely positive atmosphere and the teacher skilfully developed the significance of the story within Virgil's *Aeneid*. This was a small group, and the teacher was fully in command of the material.
117. The lesson of **Spanish** was well taught. The Year 12 students made good progress in their understanding of written Spanish. The teacher made very good use of the interactive whiteboard but used more English than necessary to communicate with the students. Opportunities were missed to encourage greater communication in Spanish between the students.

## English

Provision in English is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very strong leadership and management.
- A Level results are above average.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and involve students actively in class.
- Students are very well motivated and achieve very well.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are very good.

### Commentary

118. Standards are above average and achievement is very good. Students enter Year 12 with broadly average standards. In AS examinations, results tend to fluctuate around the average. The proportion of A and B grades and A to E grades in A Level examinations is above average. Usually all students obtain a grade. When compared with similar schools, students do well.
119. By the end of Year 13, students are very confident and articulate, willing and able to speak in many situations. They listen very well and despite their own convictions, will consider other opinions. Students acquire a very good knowledge of their texts and can refer to them effectively. Their writing is more variable. At the beginning of Year 12, essays are often too brief because ideas are not developed in detail. They may refer to quotations, for example, but not explain them or select the significant words. Learning to plan carefully helps them overcome this in part, but less able students still find tightly written essays hard to achieve.
120. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have an excellent command of the subject and this arouses enthusiasm and interest. Students are hard working and prepare carefully for lessons. They respond to the challenge and, in discussion, will extend their understanding considerably by the teachers' questioning. Lessons are organised so that students collaborate well and work independently.

Teachers mark work carefully, pointing the way to improvement very clearly. Although much guidance is given on essay-writing teachers need to develop this further.

121. The very good leadership and management have established a strong ethos. Students appreciate their texts and gain much from their study. Extra-curricular activities such as debates, outside speakers, theatre visits, film shows, and editing the school newspaper, provide enjoyable ways to explore the subject more widely. Since the last inspection there has been very good improvement because in addition to maintaining standards, the quality of teaching and learning is now very good.

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

122. Students in the sixth form have very good literacy skills. They are very good listeners and articulate, although more opportunities for discussion in some subjects would be welcome. Their comprehension skills are very good; key words are taught, but they absorb and extend their general vocabulary well. They are able to take effective notes in all subjects. Essay writing skills are not quite so good. They plan and draft, but in Year 12 particularly are not always able to develop ideas in the required detail. These skills develop well in Year 13 and students receive individual help for their improvement.

### **French**

Provision in French is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- All students achieve very well and those in Year 13 make particularly rapid progress.
- Teachers always use French to communicate with students, in the classroom and outside.
- The department draws on a very broad range of material for students to learn from, making excellent use of the Internet.
- Students manage their work very well as a result of the excellent guidance their teachers provide.

### **Commentary**

123. A Level examination results in 2004 were well above average, with the results of male students much further above the national average for their gender than those of female students. These results are slightly better than in 2003, but the number of candidates has fallen a little in the last three years. AS Level results in 2004 were close to the national average, but in 2003 they were well above. Standards observed in the sixth form during the inspection indicate that students take time to adapt to the demands of the course, as they prepare for the AS Level examination. In their first year, performance is in line with the national average, but students who continue with the subject in the second year work to standards which are well above the national average. They all respond very well to the high level of challenge in sixth form French and achievement overall is very good.

124. Teaching and learning are very good, with teachers using French to communicate with students throughout the course, both within and outside the classroom, enabling students to gain valuable experience. Teachers draw from a very wide range of source material, including French television, newspapers and the Internet, to interest

the students, making excellent use of the interactive whiteboards and information and communication technology generally. Students learn to organise their folders so they are able to study effectively from the start. They benefit from a very good range of enrichment activities, including conferences in London and exchange visits abroad, which are a major factor in promoting high achievement. Learning is mostly very effective, though sometimes students, particularly in their first year, are too passive in lessons.

125. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good and the course is very well led and managed. The enthusiasm of both the head of modern languages and the head of French is infectious and their dedication ensures that both set an admirable model for others to follow. The high quality of relationships within the department means that students are able to resolve speedily any difficulties they encounter by discussing them with their teachers. This very good teamwork ensures that teachers co-operate in acquiring and sharing excellent resources, which have a strong impact on learning. The department monitors the work of each teacher, keeping records of areas to develop. Although the department has not yet formed a plan to support students who come from other schools with less experience of speaking French, it analyses data carefully and is well aware of each student's progress.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Constructive relationships between teachers and their students have a considerably beneficial effect on learning.
- Integration of new students into the school, particularly females is very good although the performance of male students is better.
- Assessment is used effectively as a tool to aid progress.

### **Commentary**

126. The improvement in provision since the previous inspection is good. The subject is a popular choice for students and a reasonable number also take the further mathematics course. Results at A Level improved between 2003 and 2004. In 2004, male students attained higher than their national average, while the female students were below their national average. Overall this meant that performance was in line with the national picture. This was a good achievement by students who improved even if not significantly on the grades predicted from their GCSE performance. The current standard of work for both male and female students is above average. Students have produced good quantities of work at challenging levels of difficulty across the sixth form classes. The use of past examination questions ensure that the level of challenge is maintained and it keeps students informed of the high standards expected of them. Assessment is well used to provide further guidance for future progress.
127. Students have very good attitudes to their studies. They work well, question sensibly and are prepared to make the effort necessary for progress. Learning is good as a result. Teaching is good overall. Teachers plan lessons to make effective use of the time available. There is good pace and challenge. In the best of the lessons, good use of questions encourages students to think their way through problems. More use

of this technique, with a greater variety in the activities within lessons would support the very good work the teachers undertake outside lessons to develop an enthusiasm for the subject. However, little evidence was observed of the use of new technology as an aid to learning.

128. Leadership and management are good. In addition to the judgements in the main school, the head of department is a good role model through his obvious enthusiasm for the subject. He takes steps to raise the awareness of the subject through arranging appropriate visits and by bringing visiting speakers into school. His own subject knowledge is of a high order, as is that of his colleagues. Courses offered to students are reviewed regularly to ensure they are appropriate and are offering the best chances for success. Student recruitment remains high. The department plays its part in the school's work to induct students new to the sixth form well. Students, particularly the females, were warm in their praise for the help received both in settling into the school and in their developing plans for further and higher education.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

129. Although the attainment level of the cohort on entry was judged to be average for a sixth form, within that average students' mathematical skills are well above average. As a result subjects such as science, geography, technology, modern foreign languages and psychology find the mathematical elements dealt with competently; achievement in these subjects benefits as a result. There is no policy to develop mathematical skills as a cross-curriculum issue. However, the skills of the students in the sixth form are well above those needed to make good progress in their chosen subjects.

### **SCIENCE**

130. Chemistry was inspected in depth. Lessons were also observed in biology and physics. The one lesson of **biology** that was seen was taught satisfactorily. Students were developing their practical and analytical skills in preparation for the coursework module. Recent results in biology have been variable, although current standards are in line with the national average.
131. Two **physics** lessons were seen. Learning was secure in one lesson and good in the other, with support and guidance for individual students being a strong feature of both. Lessons consistently identified and built upon the students' existing knowledge and understanding through careful questioning and clear explanations from the teacher. Students responded very well, working co-operatively and independently as appropriate. A Level results were above the national average in both 2003 and 2004 and these high standards are being achieved by current students.

## Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good and provide a strong base for good achievement.
- The curriculum is well structured and enables students to make good, coherent progress.
- Effective leadership and management are securing improvement.

### Commentary

132. There has been a steady increase in A Level results over the past few years, so that they were above the national average in 2004, with no significant gender differences. The proportion of higher grades was also above the national average. Students performed just above the level expected, resulting in good progress from their grades at GCSE two years earlier. This positive picture is being replicated by current students who are also achieving well.
133. There is a good structure to learning, both in individual lessons and throughout the course as a whole. Older students especially recognise this and welcome the way that teachers make sure that their ideas and understanding build progressively over time. This is based on teachers ensuring that basic understanding is in place before moving on to more complex and challenging ideas. Students also believe that their teachers know them well and provide a good balance of support and challenge that is individually tailored to meet their needs most effectively. Students are expected to take increasing responsibility for their own learning, for example by checking their own responses to problems or set questions. This means that individual discussion between students and teachers is focused more specifically on weaker areas so that support is most effective in improving understanding or skill application.
134. Teachers know their subject well and are confident and assured, whether providing new information, questioning students' understanding or providing answers to students' own questions. Teachers have high expectations of what students can do and what they can achieve. Students respond well and apply themselves to the tasks and activities provided. They support each other and work well, both individually and in small groups. Positive relationships support good learning. There is some effective use of new technology, including the use of interactive whiteboards, which enhances learning. Students are also encouraged to research using the Internet and to produce presentations based on information and communication technology. There are some opportunities to capture and analyse physical data, although this aspect is relatively under-developed at present.
135. Provision has improved well since the previous inspection and is continuing to do so as a result of good leadership and management. There is an increasing consistency between teachers in their understanding and teaching, which builds effectively on a common framework for planning and assessment. Although there is some monitoring of lessons, this has yet to result in a systematic evaluation of strengths and areas for development, thereby producing a strategy for spreading most effective practice. Results are analysed and evaluated, with outcomes built into future plans. The head of department provides a strong role model for other teachers. There is a very clear

sense of direction for sustained development and good capacity for continued improvement.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results at AS and A Level are well above average, and advanced vocational course results are above average.
- In all courses achievement is very good overall, largely as a result of very good teaching.
- The breadth and flexibility of sixth form courses ensures that the needs of all students can be met; enabling them to reach their full potential; however, numbers are small in some advanced level vocational classes.

### Commentary

136. This is a very successful department in which improvement since the last inspection is very good. The department offers a good number of advanced level courses to cater for a broad range of aptitudes and abilities. Examination results at A Level improved in 2004 and were well above average for the proportion who gained an A or B grade. All candidates passed the examination. At AS Level, results were slightly lower than the previous year but were still well above average. In the advanced vocational course, results were slightly lower than the previous year and were close to the average but this represented very good achievement for the male students and good achievement for the female students who joined the school in Year 12.
137. Standards seen during the inspection were well above average in the AS and A Level courses. Students are very diligent and keen to reach a very high standard. Achievement is very good. In the vocational A Level course there is a wider range of ability and standards overall were above average, although some very good work was also in evidence from stronger candidates. Achievement is also very good for students following the vocational option. The department offers a small number of students on this course, a chance to complete a Level 3 course.
138. Students respond well to challenging teaching, which ensures very good learning and enables them to reach their full potential in all courses. All courses are very well planned and resourced. Members of staff in the department have considerable experience in further education or business use of information and communication technology, which adds a very useful perspective to the work of the department. Teachers insist upon demanding standards, particularly in coursework. Because assessment is thorough with detailed feedback, students know how to improve further. Resources have improved significantly and this has had a positive impact upon teaching, learning and standards. However, the sharing of a large, new and well equipped teaching space can limit the range of methods adopted by teachers. In particular, it can inhibit the use and effectiveness of review sessions, due to the close proximity of other classes.
139. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Roles are allocated to make good use of staff expertise. Careful planning and resource use enables the department to be creative in catering for all students and courses. Very good use is made of on-line resources and the Internet in general. The recording and reporting systems are effective, efficient and informative; they make a significant contribution to its success.

## Information and communication technology across the curriculum

140. The use of information and communication technology across the curriculum is very good. By the time students reach the sixth form they have very good skills, knowledge and competence. This is put to very good use in the majority of subjects for research, data analysis and the presentation of class work and coursework. Students have good access to resources, many of which are new. They can readily transfer their work between school and home via the Internet to facilitate their learning. Use is good in English and design and technology. The religious education department has developed its own well presented website. Weaker areas, which require further development, are the use of new technology to enhance teaching and learning in some aspects of the various science subjects and psychology, but particularly in the art department where use is unsatisfactory.

## HUMANITIES

141. Government and politics, geography, psychology and religious education were inspected in detail. **History** was not a focus subject but one Year 13 lesson was sampled. Teaching was very good. The teacher made very good use of the time to develop students' skills through planning and conducting a debate about the power struggle in Russia after the death of Lenin. This activity consolidated their very good learning about the Russian revolution and also developed their thinking and debating skills, so that they achieved very well on all fronts. Standards seen in the lesson were above average, which is consistent with results in the AS and A Level examinations in 2004. History is an extremely popular subject. A large number of students choose it every year and last year all who started both the AS and the A Level courses completed their studies. The majority of Year 12 history students were out of school on a visit to Russia during the inspection week.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is enthusiastic, stimulating and constantly challenging so that students are fully engaged in all aspects of their learning.
- Students benefit from lessons which are prepared by teachers to ensure very good opportunities for interactive learning.
- As in the main school, new technology is used effectively in the majority of lessons to enrich the learning experience.

## Commentary

142. Results at A level in 2004 were broadly in line with national averages but with some variations by gender. Approximately two-thirds of male students but less than one third of females gained a grade A or B, although the numbers of female students who took the subject at A Level in 2004 were too small to make a significant impact on standards overall. However, all female students made good progress because they achieved equal to or better than their predicted grades and better than in their other school subjects. At the end of Year 12 in 2004, results at AS Level were above

average. Standards currently are above average overall with students being able to explain complex interactions referring to a wide range of factors. Improvement since the previous inspection is good with the maintenance of standards over a prolonged period. Leadership and management are good. All teachers demonstrate commitment and the capacity to work hard for the benefit of the students. In return students have very positive attitudes. This results in very good achievement.

143. Teaching and learning are now both very good, and methods have been improved considerably. Teachers' expectations are high. There is now very good encouragement and engagement of students. This stems from the imaginative planning of lessons which are no longer confined to a narrow style. Teaching is far more interactive than reported at the previous inspection and frequently involves the use of new technology. Students' learning is enhanced when they are engaged in their learning at every stage in lessons. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, a group work activity involved students producing a map from memory. Not only did the activity have a competitive edge but enabled them to remember far more than if they had just been issued with information. Progress in learning was very good as the students gained greatly in their understanding at a very early stage in a topic. Understanding is developed further through extended writing for homework. This is generally of a good standard with teachers commenting extensively on students' work, explaining why it is good or how to improve it. The presentation of work in students' folders shows conscientiousness and good motivation. The students appreciate the wide range of activities and methods which teachers use to engage their interest. Although female students are in a distinct minority in all groups, they nevertheless feel fully included. All students feel that work is pitched at the right level for them, which enables them to achieve well. They benefit from the feedback they get from teachers and the opportunities that teachers provide for help outside the school day.

## **Psychology**

Provision in psychology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Examination results are above national averages and for most students are higher than predicted by their overall GCSE results.
- There are very good relationships between staff and students.
- Assessment is very good; students have a clear view of the level of their work and what they need to do to improve and appreciate the academic and personal support they are given.
- New technology is insufficiently used to support learning and there are insufficient opportunities to attend talks or links with students at other schools.
- There is not consistent stimulation and challenge to higher ability students through the provision of extension work.

## **Commentary**

144. Achievement is good and standards are above average in both Year 12 and Year 13. The examination results in 2004 were above the national average for students in both AS Level and A Level. The results have been improving steadily so that students achieved 100 percent A to E grades for the first time at A Level in 2004. Male and female students have similar success in examinations. The number of students taking psychology remains high; this year 85 students are taking examination courses.

145. AS Level psychology is a completely new subject for all students coming into Year 12 and they have to adjust to a range of study skills. They quickly grasp specific vocabulary and with practice use it appropriately. Their written work is of a good standard and they have plenty of opportunities to work on essays or answer shorter questions. They are enthusiastic about the subject and show interest in it. In class, students listen carefully to their teachers and contribute briefly when asked. They occasionally ask questions, but tend to be rather passive learners. By Year 13, students have developed the skills of using subject-specific language and can generally express themselves very articulately. There are opportunities for students to excel in their investigation work and occasionally the work produced is outstanding. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, with a high level of respect being shown.
146. Teaching and learning are good with some very good features. Teachers are experienced and are very knowledgeable about the subject. Lessons are planned in detail and are very structured, but do not generally include activities to challenge students across the ability range and higher-attaining students in particular. There is some graded questioning targeted at various levels of attainment and extension work is suggested for students to read round the subject. At times, lessons are very dominated by the teachers and those seen did not include much discussion or debate. New technology is insufficiently used and is recognised as an area for development. There is also limited opportunity for broadening the students' ideas about psychology through the use of visiting speakers, or attending talks or conferences outside the school. There is a strong emphasis on personal and academic support, which is very much appreciated by the students. The work on ethics contributes very well to the students' moral development. Frequent assessment and self assessment ensure that students have a clear view of the level at which they are working. Marking is regular, accurate and realistic and provides constructive comments about how the students might improve their performance. Literacy and oracy are very strong and students are very well able to contribute to debates and express their opinions.
147. Leadership and management are good. The teachers are constantly seeking methods to adjust their teaching and so improve their results. They search for factors which may affect the examination grades, such as larger teaching groups and change these when they are able. Both the teachers work very closely together and share ideas. Areas for development such as increasing the use of new technology, improving challenge for the more able and the development of teaching and learning styles are recognised.

## **Religious education**

Provision in religious education is **excellent**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is challenging students to obtain very high standards and produces excellent achievement.
- The constructive teacher-student relationships and high quality teaching are enabling students to participate in high levels of discussion.
- Excellent leadership and management use the diversity in the department as a strength.

## Commentary

148. Religious education is an exceptionally successful subject. It is very popular amongst students, who speak highly of the quality of the course and the inspiration provided by their teachers. The subject contributes significantly to the students' personal development as well as producing high academic standards. The A Level examination results in 2004 were very high in comparison with the national average. Results over the last few years have been consistently high. AS Level results in 2004 were also high with a very substantial proportion of students taking the subject on to A Level. Achievement is excellent; almost all students obtain the highest grades of A and B and grades that are above or well above those predicted by their overall GCSE results. The standard of work of the current Years 12 and Year 13 is also very high; the students were seen coming to terms with various philosophical and ethical views and applying them to actual situations.
149. Teaching is excellent overall and this is resulting in excellent learning with current students making excellent progress. The high levels of the teachers' subject knowledge, evident in their lesson planning and in the answers to students' questions, enables students to understand difficult concepts. Teachers have highly effective relationships with students who respond very well to the challenging teaching. They are motivated to read around the subject and develop their independent learning skills. Lessons are lively with a high level of expectation and challenge as well as student involvement in very high level discussions and debates. However, at times the teachers tend to fill in the answer rather than use questioning to develop the students' understanding further.
150. The team of staff work closely together and are excellent role models. As teachers, they are diverse in style and the students appreciate this as a benefit to their learning. They have raised the profile of the subject so that the numbers studying it at this level are now high. Very little reference was made in the last report to religious education in the sixth form, but standards are higher and the number of students studying the subject has risen; this represents very good improvement. Religious education is provided for all students in the sixth form, as required by the Agreed syllabus and during the inspection a visiting speaker challenged the students to act on their beliefs.

## Government and politics

Provision in government and politics is **excellent**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and A Level results exceed students' personal targets.
- Students' achievement is excellent, especially considering that they started their sixth form courses with no prior experience of the subject.
- Excellent teaching enables students to be fully responsible for their own learning.

## Commentary

151. In 2004, A Level results were well above the national average, particularly for students attaining A and B grades. Further analysis shows that the majority of students achieved above their personal targets. Results have fluctuated in earlier years, but the trend has been upwards and generally above average. Male students have generally done better than female students, although no differences were seen

between the standards of their work during the inspection. AS Level results have generally been a little below average but these outcomes have been successfully used as a focus for student self-analysis and personal development planning, leading to improved performance at A Level.

152. These high standards represent excellent achievement, particularly considering that none of the students has had any prior experience of the subject before coming into the sixth form, and several of them chose it by default in place of other subjects they were not able to study. Without exception, they now find it their favourite subject and retention has been 100 percent on both courses. Over the last three years approximately 35 percent of the students on the course have taken up places at university reading politics and related disciplines.
153. Standards of work seen in lessons and in students' folders during the inspection are well above average. An extensive body of written work includes essays that follow complex analytical arguments, and notes preparing for parliamentary-style debates to be held in class and in the weekly lunchtime debating club. In class, students displayed a very high standard of debating skills and it was mainly through these debates, with shaping interjections by the teacher, that learning took place. In effect, by Year 13 the students were teaching each other, as discussion swept back and forth about the motives and structure of parliamentary and party activities. At all times, students used high-level specialist vocabulary and any sloppy phrasing or illogical thinking was quickly brought to account, either by the teacher or by other students.
154. Lessons are full of stimulation and interest, and topics such as the parallels between the Thatcher and Blair administrations are developed with authority and good humour and make an excellent contribution to students' social and moral development. Every statement made by students is challenged so that they produce supporting evidence for their opinions, which ensures that they not only learn facts but learn to think critically about received opinion. Questioning and assessment techniques are excellent, and folders are regularly checked. Students also learn through peer grading and marking of sample examination answers so that they become well aware of their standards and of how to raise them. This excellent teaching inevitably leads to excellent learning.
155. This strong department is extremely well managed by a committed teacher, who is an excellent role model and an inspirational leader. Students' learning experiences are enhanced by regular visits from leading politicians and other notable speakers, by attending conferences, and by journeys overseas in conjunction with the history department. As the department was not reported on in the previous inspection, it is not possible to make an informed judgement about improvement since then. However, the signs are that improvement through planning and development is a continuing and successful process.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

### **Design and technology**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' subject knowledge and technical expertise supports students understanding of design and manufacture very effectively and ensures very good achievement.
- Students are highly motivated, keen and interested in their work, supporting very good learning and achievement.
- Quality of assessment, verbal and written feedback is very good and highly valued by students who recognise that this supports their learning very effectively.
- A wider range of learning resources and products for analysis used in designing could increase creativity and innovation and improve attainment at the higher grades in AS and A Level examinations.

## Commentary

156. Achievement is very good; progress shown in work seen indicates that students' standards currently in Years 12 and 13 are above the national average. This is similar to the position at the time of the last inspection. Results at A Level in 2004 were above the national average, an improvement on results in 2003, which were in line with the national average. Results at AS Level in 2004 were well above the national average, a significant improvement on results in 2003, which were in line with the national average. Teaching is very good; teachers' expectations are high and work set is demanding. Students' attitudes to their learning are very positive, they are highly motivated, and this supports very good progress and continuous improvement in standards, which are well above the national average by the end of A Level courses. Work seen is of a very good standard of manufacture and precise finish. Design folders reflect sophisticated use of the design process and new technology for research, investigation and presentation. Students have good access to a range of extra-curricular activities, as well as visits to local industrial companies, museums and exhibitions. This motivates students very well and inspires the most able to be both creative and innovative and to achieve very well.
157. Teaching is very good. Teachers are very knowledgeable, they plan and resource a curriculum which very effectively builds on the standards achieved in GCSE examinations. Lessons are taught at a cracking pace. Expert questioning, advice, support and evaluative comment effectively encourage students to think in a technological way. Students' learning is very good. Individuals are very well supported by teachers whose assessment and feedback procedures very effectively ensure that their needs are met and the next steps for learning identified. Students value highly the expertise, support and availability of teachers and recognise the essential contribution they make to their learning. Students respond well to the pace and challenge set and take full responsibility for the progress they make. They select and use new technology and other resources with confidence, choosing appropriate software, materials and style of presentation to support their learning well. Their numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology skills are very well developed enabling them to study effectively and present their work very well.
158. Leadership and management are both very good. The focus for further improvement is appropriately on developing a wider range of learning resources as starting points for design work to increase creativity and innovation further and to increase performance at the higher grades at both AS and A Level. The curriculum and resources, are well organised to meet the needs of students and support their achievement very effectively. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards and examination results have been maintained. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and improved, particularly access to new technology. Members of staff are very well supported by the head of department. Teamwork is a strength. Teachers

and the technician are organised to teach and support aspects of courses for which they are best qualified. This supports the students' achievement very effectively and has had a significant impact on standards.

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

159. Media studies along with music and music technology were inspected in depth. Lessons were also observed in art and theatre studies.
160. Results in **art** at A Level in 2004 were below average. This was a considerable fall from previous recent years, although results at AS Level were well above average, with students achieving better than expected given their performance at GCSE. From work seen during the inspection students in Year 12, who are all of above average ability, are working at a level above average and Year 13, are working at around the average level. Both groups of students are achieving much as expected as a result of satisfactory teaching. They are conscientious and well motivated and their very good attitudes contribute positively to their learning. There has been staff instability recently and students in a Year 13 group in particular are not receiving enough individual attention to enable them to achieve well. Assessment criteria are not used carefully or often enough to inform students clearly about their strengths and weaknesses. Students are very fortunate to have a sixth form studio in which to work out of timetabled lesson times. Trips to Paris, London and a local trip to the Henry Moore foundation enhance understanding and inspire them.
161. An excellent and a very good lesson in **theatre studies** were observed in Year 13. Teachers' subject knowledge, skilful planning and splendid use of resources challenged and excited students. They learned much about Brecht and Grotowski in these lessons and they also showed that they were learning to think for themselves and to apply and develop their own skills. Drama at many levels enriches the school's extra-curricular programme. The many and varied productions are often cross-curricular, and the co-operation between the departments of drama and music with a director from the science department was seen during the week of the inspection. Drama, both in and outside lessons, is contributing much to students' cultural experience and to their personal and social development.

### **Music and music technology**

Provision in music and music technology is **very good**.

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

- Very well taught courses enable students to study to their strengths.
- Standards are well above average, due to the strong personalised support students receive.
- There is a wealth of opportunities to develop performance skills, but opportunities for students to present compositions are limited.

#### **Commentary**

162. Results in music technology A Level in 2004 were well above average. Too few students took music at A Level to make reliable national comparison. The trend in recent years shows students achieving very well in each subject. These standards and achievement are being maintained in both courses in Years 12 and 13. The

majority of students taking music technology are male, but on the music courses genders are equally mixed. Some students take both courses. New accommodation, with a dedicated computer room and very good studio, has provided a fillip to students to take the music technology course in Year 12. Students speak very highly of how these factors suit their aspirations.

163. Year 13 music students have a very good level of aural perception and express themselves very well, applying technical vocabulary readily and accurately. Many perform and compose to a very high standard, but chorale writing is less secure. Too many students approach this as a mechanistic rather than a musical exercise, leading to marked inconsistencies. Technique is more secure in Year 12. Music technology students have a very good grasp of studio techniques and use technology creatively to extend their skills in composition and arrangement. All students have very secure subject knowledge.
164. Excellent subject skills of teachers and the close relations they share with the students create an open environment which supports very good learning. Teaching is systematic and methodical, leading students coherently through course material. In music, medium- and long-term deadlines are not made explicit enough, making for some rushed preparation for coursework and concerts. The teaching of chorale harmonisation does not engage students sufficiently to hear and perform their work as it develops, so also losing an opportunity to consolidate other aspects of the course. Marking is thorough: it is both evaluative and diagnostic. Very good attention to detail is shown in the music technology teaching, securing slightly higher achievement than on the music course.
165. The courses are very well led and managed. Students benefit greatly from the extensive extra-curricular provision, but opportunities for them to take initiative are constrained by the expectation that they will perform at all major events. Consequently, they have little opportunity to lead ensembles other than occasional rock bands, and there is no open forum for the presentation and appraisal of their compositions. Students feel that they are given very good advice and guidance about courses and about options for continued study in higher education. Standards and numbers have risen and the subject has made good improvement since the previous inspection.

## **Media studies**

Provision in media studies is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results of the AS Level examination taken by students at the end of their first year were above average and showed good progress.
- The number of students taking this new course has doubled in one year; students in Year 13 expressed satisfaction and enthusiasm in discussing the new subject.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and access to resources limited.
- The quality of teaching is uneven and best practice has not been sufficiently evaluated and shared.

## **Commentary**

166. The new media studies A Level was introduced in September 2003 and its leadership and management taken over by a member of the modern foreign languages department in September 2004. The teaching is now shared by a teacher from the English department who has a qualification in film studies. All teachers share enthusiasm for the subject and good subject knowledge. Students' achievement is good and standards are average overall.
167. As the A Level examinations have yet to be taken, comparisons cannot be made with national standards. However, students made good progress in relation to their overall GCSE results and above average standards were attained in the AS Level examination. Students' folders of work showed developing understanding of media issues and debates. The foundation production task of a teenage magazine resulted in some well designed covers, and plans for the Year 13 advanced production began in the inspection week. Standards of practical work in film production could not be judged, as none was being done during the inspection days and no videos were available. No editing or work at computers was seen. However, awareness of professional film editing techniques was being well taught and learnt in a very good Year 12 lesson.
168. The quality of teaching as shown in the results and the work folders is good overall. The enthusiasm for the subject which students expressed in interview and the doubling of numbers taking this option also indicate good teaching in the first year. However, there is a marked disparity between the methods used in the very good lessons and those adopted in others. Where teaching is most effective, careful planning ensures maximum involvement of students in a variety of activities. They are expected to take a lead when sharing their research findings with the group and there is good evidence of independent learning. The use of well chosen film clips to illustrate key points prompted lively response and thoughtful discussion in one successful lesson. The teacher's excellent knowledge of the subject was used to illustrate, shape and extend their ideas and understanding, and to encourage good interaction. Less successful lessons rely too much on teacher direction and questioning, with no prepared contributions from students and a lack of variety of methods and activities. Resources are not well used. For example, in lessons discussing BBC and other television programmes, no clips were shown to focus discussion or stimulate argument. As a result, students spent the lesson listening or answering questions and the lesson became too much like a lecture. Even the teacher's keen and informed interest in the subject did not make up for the lack of purposeful interaction and independent learning in these lessons.
169. Accommodation and seating arrangements are unsatisfactory. In the two laboratories mainly used for media studies lessons, students have to sit in rows facing the front making whole-group discussion difficult. In contrast, the lesson on editing took place in a room where a semi circle of tables enabled students to discuss and present their conclusions effectively, and the teacher made excellent use of this in the planning and management of the lesson. At present, the lack of a dedicated space for media studies should be a concern to the department and school, as the subject begins to establish itself as a popular and successful A Level option.
170. Both teachers who have been responsible for introducing the subject are enthusiasts, and a satisfactory start has been well led and managed. Schemes of work show satisfactory understanding of the examination requirements and criteria. A well-attended film club contributes to the school's extra-curricular programme. However, there is little recorded evidence of systematic analysis of results and progress in the

new subject, or evaluation of teaching methods and the supply and use of resources. Forward planning, departmental consultation and the defining and sharing of good practice have not been given enough attention.

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

171. Several sixth form lessons in **physical education** were sampled on this well established course where students invariably achieve well, all 24 students gaining at least a pass in 2004, a quarter with one of the top two grades. In the most effective lesson - a very good and enthusiastically taught Year 13 lesson on the history of sport - the teacher very effectively used a stimulating activity involving participation in a mock nineteenth century lesson to reinforce understanding. Teaching and learning overall are good with students having a positive attitude and enjoying their studies. Teaching takes place in a spacious classroom in the school pavilion; however, it has no computer facilities and it remains under-developed as an effective learning environment. Students in the sixth form benefit from an extensive range of school teams and extra-curricular activities, including a full timetabled programme of sports once a week. Participation rates are good and school teams, particularly in rugby, football and cricket participate at a high level with extensive fixtures against many of the top sporting schools in the country. Many students progress to gain county and occasionally national honours. The school benefits from the exclusive use of superb off-site games facilities although these are only currently used for fixtures and extra-curricular activities.
172. One lesson was also observed in **leisure and recreation**. This was given by a guest speaker from a leisure centre who was a former student at the school. The students achieved well because they were fully engaged in the lesson which was well organised and related well to the sixth form careers programme.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve very well in this area with the 2004 AS Level students performing particularly well.
- Teaching is very good with very well prepared and enthusiastically taught lessons.
- Students have a very positive attitude to the subject and work productively in and out of lessons.
- Courses are very well managed and students' progress on them is evaluated very effectively.
- Business trips and visiting speakers to support learning are under-developed.

### **Commentary**

173. The department offers a broad range of subjects to cater for students of varying abilities including economics A Level, leisure and recreation AVCE, business studies A Level and business AVCE, the latter two being the focus of the inspection. Results for the full 2004 business A Level were in line with the national average, but with the proportion gaining one of the top grades above the national average. Results for the

AS Level are invariably even better and in 2004 twenty of the thirty-two candidates entered gained the top grades. Students on the business AVCE course have lower entry grades but achieve well with 92 percent gaining at least a pass grade in 2004. Current students on both courses are performing at least as well with some exceptionally talented students identified, including students on the AVCE course who are consistently producing work at an A grade standard. Achievement overall in the area is very good.

174. The department provides an excellent learning environment with courses which are very well planned, students who are very well supported in and out of class with access to staff which is much appreciated. In addition, lessons are generally enthusiastically taught by the four subject specialists. Very good teaching and students' positive attitude to the subject ensures that they make very good progress in their understanding and application of business concepts and technical vocabulary. For example, students were able to calculate and apply contribution costing principles in a good Year 13 AVCE lesson, were able to explain the impact of exchange rate changes on business in a very good Year 13 A Level lesson and Year 12 AVCE students were able to apply a marketing SWOT analysis to businesses. Teachers make excellent use of the department's and school's computer facilities to support learning. All students are proficient users of relevant software including for presentations. Teaching is less effective when it becomes too teacher-centred or taught at too pedestrian a pace.
175. The Young Enterprise scheme makes an excellent contribution to students on the AVCE course and to the school generally where many important principles of business and entrepreneurship are developed. The day devoted to outside speakers observed on the inspection was excellent, and the timetabled business days contribute to improving business understanding at the school. However, there are currently insufficient trips and visiting speakers to provide a more practical element to students' progress on the business courses, a situation which the department is tackling.
176. The monitoring of student progress is very good and under-achieving students are identified and given additional support. Assessment of student work is thorough. The precise requirements of the vocational courses very well understood, although feedback on ongoing work is not always as extensive, consistent and precise as it could be. The subject area is led and managed very well with excellent teamwork and a shared commitment to improving the department's and students' performance further. The departmental plan is extensive but unwieldy and does not include explicit action points and related evaluative targets to move the department on further, for example by stating precise attainment and achievement levels which might match the impressive 2004 AS Level results. Accommodation and resources are very good but one business room is unbearably hot for the teacher and students. There has been good progress since the last inspection.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

177. Provision for the students' **personal, social and health education** is made through the tutorial programme and the weekly general studies lessons, which often include guest speakers. Three lessons in the tutorial programme were observed. These were at least well taught and contributed considerably to the students' careers education, particularly with reference to preparing for higher education. The guest speaker during the week of the inspection was a former Zimbabwean test cricketer. He spoke in depth about his experiences and how his stance against the government had

affected his life. This provoked considerable thought from the students, who were very engaged and asked very thoughtful questions.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How inclusive the school is		3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>2</b>
Students' achievement	2	2
<b>Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>2</b>
Attendance	2	2
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	2
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well students learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	3
How well the curriculum meets students needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		4
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	3
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	3	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3	3
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	3
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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