

# INSPECTION REPORT

## THE PLUME SCHOOL

Maldon

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115318

Headteacher: Miss S Dignasse

Lead inspector: Mr M Beale

Dates of inspection: 14 – 18 March 2005

Inspection number: 269563

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:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1651
School address:	Fambridge Road Maldon Essex
Postcode:	CM9 6AB
Telephone number:	01621 854681
Fax number:	01621 855913
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Binder
Date of previous inspection:	26 April 1999

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

This large school operating on two sites about a mile apart (Mill Road for Years 7 and 8 and Fambridge Road for Years 9 to 13), has a large sixth form. Student numbers have increased considerably since the last inspection. The school gained specialist arts college status in September 2003. Few students, about three per cent of the roll, are from minority ethnic backgrounds; there are 10 traveller children and 12 students who are in the care of the local authority. No students are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs is broadly average while the number with statements is below average. Attainment on entry to the main school and to the sixth form is below average. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is broadly in line with the national average. About 60 per cent of students stay on into the sixth form, which offers a good range of academic and vocational courses. The school received Schools Achievement Awards for its improving GCSE results in 2000, 2001 and 2002. It has achieved Sportsmark and Artsmark awards and was re-accredited with Investors in People status in 2003. The school has also received the National Excellence in Mentoring Award.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19385	Martin Beale	Lead inspector	English as an additional language
32697	David Smith	Lay inspector	
27188	Gill Murray	Team inspector	English
32379	Bob Brewster	Team inspector	Mathematics
4126	Clive Parsons	Team inspector	Science Biology (Sixth form)
8052	Ken McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Business studies (Sixth form)
30563	Jackie Pentlow	Team inspector	Religious education
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
11190	Winifred Burke	Team inspector	Design and technology
32597	John Marchant	Team inspector	Geography
10759	Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	History Sociology (Sixth form)
12408	Alan Frith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Citizenship
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Music
25748	Roger Moyle	Team inspector	Physical education
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Leisure and recreation (Sixth form) Special educational needs
28003	Susan Taylor	Team inspector	Psychology (Sixth form)

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This very good school** benefits considerably from the high quality leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by a strong staff team, and provides very good value for money. Achievement is good, largely because a significant proportion of the teaching motivates the students to work hard; however, low aspirations limit progress and lower the standards of a small minority, mainly boys. The school is serving its community very well and its reputation is justifiably improving to the extent that it is heavily oversubscribed. Both sites are calm, purposeful and harmonious enabling the students to feel happy and secure. Its status as a specialist performing arts school is used very effectively to enhance learning and to support the work of other schools.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the high quality of much of the teaching is leading to improved achievement and rising standards;
- highly effective leadership is generating a clear direction for the school and is ensuring that priorities for improvement are implemented thoroughly and rigorously evaluated;
- the curriculum is planned carefully to meet the school's commitment to ensuring that all students can participate and achieve; this is particularly effective for students with special educational needs and in the alternative and flexible approaches to courses in Years 9 to 13;
- support and guidance is targeted well at individuals because robust assessment systems are used to identify their needs and how they can improve;
- the school has placed itself at the heart of the community and forged strong and productive links that support well the students' achievement and broadens their experiences.

Improvement since the last inspection is good and the school is well placed to improve further. GCSE results have risen more rapidly than nationally. Although A Level results are lower than at the time of the last inspection the school now adopts lower entry criteria to courses and achievement is in fact better. Teaching is better, attendance rates are higher and behaviour has improved through more consistent implementation of the discipline policy. In modern foreign languages, very effective management and good teaching have led to higher standards, a subject that was a cause for concern. Spiritual development has improved although the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship and requirements for religious education are not currently met above Year 9.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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 good throughout the school.** Students make good progress from below average attainment on entry; overall standards are average by Years 9 and 11 and in the sixth form. Girls achieve well and outperform boys in tests and examinations; action taken to redress this balance is meeting with success in subjects such as English. Overall Year 9 test results were average in 2004 and above results in similar schools. English results were

above average while results in mathematics and science were average. Current standards in these subjects by Year 9 are similar to these test results and they are average by Year 11, reflecting the 2004 GCSE results. Students with special educational needs achieve very well because teachers support their learning in a wide variety of ways. Action introduced this year to extend potentially high attaining students particularly in Years 10 and 11 is beginning to bear fruit; however, this has yet to make a lasting impact on their achievement.

**The students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.** Attitudes to learning are good. The majority of students are positive, work hard and are keen to succeed; however, a significant minority have comparatively low expectations of what they can achieve and do not fully participate or take responsibility for their learning. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Attendance and punctuality are good.

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education is very good as is teaching.** Students' learning and skills develop well because a high proportion of lessons are expertly taught by confident and enthusiastic teachers. Their teaching is interesting and seeks to involve the students in their learning and the assessment of their progress, although this is not successful with all students. Teaching is most effective in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. The curriculum is being used innovatively as a vehicle for meeting the needs, interests and aspirations of all students. It provides carefully planned routes from Year 9 upwards and links well with sixth form courses and other post-16 opportunities. The students' experiences are considerably enhanced by the wide range of interesting and well-attended clubs and other activities, particularly in the performing arts and sport. The school involves its students very creatively in evaluating what is provided and helping to shape developments. The quality of advice and guidance, both academic and personal, is very effectively targeted at meeting individual needs. Strong and constructive links have been developed with the local community and with other schools and colleges. These play a considerable part in supporting the students' development such as through the community mentoring programme.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good overall** and are contributing significantly to rising standards. The headteacher has focused the work of staff on improving teaching and learning. Consequently, they are reflective, keen to improve and supported by well-organised training and careful monitoring of new developments. Governors play a major role in helping to shape the school's direction and monitoring aspects of its work. They challenge constructively and have considerable expertise; they know the school's strengths and support planning to tackle any shortcomings. However, statutory requirements for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and for the daily act of collective worship are not met.

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

Parents and students have very positive views about the school. They feel it has improved in recent years and put much of this down to the headteacher and her team. They particularly like the arrangements when students transfer into the school and when they move to the upper school site in Year 9. The students also value the extra-curricular opportunities provided. However, they are unhappy with the toilets on the upper school site, a view shared by the inspection team and the school, which has plans in place for their improvement.

### **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- continue the work being undertaken to raise the achievement of students who are not sufficiently committed to learning or motivated to participate fully;
- provide more effectively for the co-ordinated development of the students' personal, social, health and citizenship skills in the sixth form;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- for the teaching of religious education in Years 10 and 11;
- the daily act of collective worship.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT PLUME SCHOOL

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This very effective sixth form** meets the needs and aspirations of its students very well. It has made good progress since the last inspection and provides very good cost-effectiveness. Entry to the sixth form is open to students of all abilities and consequently attainment on entry is below average. However, students achieve well as a result of their positive attitude to learning, access to a very good range of resources and very good teaching. Although standards overall are average, they are improving with the majority of students doing better than their GCSE results predict. The sixth form is very well led and managed with a clear focus on raising attainment. Sixth form accommodation is very good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- achievement in most subjects is at least good;
- very good teaching and excellent teacher-student relations ensure that all students make good progress in and out of lessons;
- students receive very good academic and personal support, advice and guidance from a strong team of tutors and the head of sixth form;
- students have very good attitudes to learning and contribute well to the life and ethos of the school;
- curriculum time for developing the students' personal, social, health and citizenship skills is limited.

### 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> Lively and challenging teaching creates enthusiasm and confidence in students of all abilities. Hence, they make very good progress because they are encouraged to become independent learners.
Mathematics	<b>Provision in mathematics is good.</b> Achievement is good, the majority of students gaining grades higher than their GCSE results predict. Good teaching and very good attitudes encourage students' understanding.
Science	<b>Provision in biology is satisfactory.</b> Teaching and learning are now good with students' achievement being satisfactory but improving. Effective leadership and management of the subject is improving provision.
Information and communication technology	This area was not inspected in depth; however, students have satisfactory skills that are used appropriately to support learning in other subjects.
Humanities	<b>Provision in geography is satisfactory.</b> A Level results are below average but achievement is satisfactory as a result of students' positive attitudes and well planned lessons which provide numerous learning opportunities. <b>Provision in psychology is good.</b> Very competent and well-structured teaching ensures that the students achieve well. <b>Provision in sociology is good.</b> Students achieve well because teaching is lively and enables them to become confident learners.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Provision in art and design is good.</b> Students are encouraged to develop individually and to achieve well through support from dedicated and expert teachers. <b>Provision in music is very good.</b> Students achieve very well and standards are well above average. This is due to the very good teaching

and the effort the students contribute to their own learning.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel

**Provision in leisure and recreation is very good.** Very good teaching, leadership, management and the students' positive attitudes ensure that achievement is very good.

**Provision in physical education is very good.** Standards are above average with very good achievement because of high quality teaching and students' very good attitudes to the subject.

Business

**Provision in business studies is good.** Examinations results are improving with good achievement on the advanced vocational, AS and A Level courses.

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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**

Students have access to a wide range of support and guidance both for their academic studies as well as for pastoral support. A strong team of tutors monitor their progress and academic targets closely. Advice on entry to the sixth form and their career and higher education choices are very well planned. Students have very good opportunities to express their views and concerns. However, there is no formal timetabled session to develop their wider personal development and learning skills.

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

**Leadership in the sixth form is very good.** There is a clear vision for developing the sixth form with a focus on raising achievement and standards. A team of dedicated tutors are led with commitment and enthusiasm. **The sixth form is managed very well.** Subject and individual student performance are monitored and evaluated and are a focus for regular meetings with faculty heads and tutors. Very good use is being made of electronic systems to record student information.

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

Students have a very positive attitude to their studies and enjoy being in the sixth form. They appreciate the access to their subject teachers and tutors and feel that they are treated as adults. Teaching is seen as varied and challenging and is a good preparation for those intending to go on to study at university. Preparation and advice for higher education and future careers is very well planned. They value the extensive range of extra-curricular activities in sport and the performing arts area for those who wish to participate.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is good overall, although girls' achievement is better than that of boys. Girls have also gained better examination results than boys at GCSE and A Level, particularly at the higher grades. There are no significant variations in attainment by students of differing ethnic groups. Students make good progress from below average attainment on entry to the school. Standards are rising and are average overall throughout the school, including in the sixth form.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have risen more rapidly than nationally since the last inspection and were in line with both the national average and results in similar schools in 2004.
- Much teaching motivates the students to try hard and is leading to good achievement and rising standards throughout the school.
- A small but significant number of students, mainly boys, have low aspirations and do not achieve as well as they might.

#### Commentary

1. Year 9 test results have fluctuated in recent years; however, they are higher overall than at the time of the last inspection. English results rose in 2004 and were above the national average and above results in similar schools. Mathematics results fell slightly in 2004 and were in line with both the national and similar schools averages. Science results rose slightly in 2004 and were in line with the national average and results in similar schools in 2004, but were only at the same level as in 2000, whereas English and mathematics were much higher. These results represent good progress given the students' below average attainment on entry to the school. Progress was better across Years 7 to 9 in English and science than in mathematics when compared to the students' standards in each subject on entry to the school. Girls have performed better than boys in recent years and particularly so in English. The most recent group of girls also made more rapid progress than boys in English and science during Years 7 to 9; boys and girls made similar rates of progress in mathematics.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.5 (31.5)	n/a (33.4)
mathematics	35.7 (35.9)	n/a (35.4)
science	33.4 (33.0)	n/a (33.6)

*There were 290 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

2. Given the students' earlier Year 9 test results, their GCSE results in 2004 represented satisfactory overall progress. As at Year 9, girls have regularly gained higher overall results than boys, although only in 2004 was the difference greater than nationally. This particular year group contained a large number of high attaining girls, which was

reflected in the proportion of A\* and A grades for girls being three times the proportion for boys. However, girls achieved well, while a small minority of boys did not achieve all that they were capable of given their earlier attainment. Furthermore, over the last three years girls have exceeded their overall targets while boys have not always achieved theirs. Results in 2004 in biology, drama and French were significantly above average while they were significantly below average in double science, computing and history. Students also did significantly worse in English, mathematics and double science than in the average of their other subjects, but significantly better in design and technology. The students also did particularly well in the short GCSE courses in religious education and citizenship when compared with their other results.

**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	48 (47)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (93)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	288.8	282.8

*There were 229 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' current good overall achievement in Years 7 to 11 is the result of several factors. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and are very good in Years 10 and 11. Most students respond well to their teachers' high expectations of their work and their behaviour. Their positive and committed approach to learning results in most students trying hard and wanting to be successful. This is not universal, particularly higher up the school. Members of staff have to work hard to overcome the low aspirations of a significant number of students, largely boys who are poorly motivated and do not fully engage with the learning process. Many actions are now being taken, including providing alternative and more relevant courses and enabling some course choice in Year 9. Further action is also being taken to raise boys' achievement in general, which has been lagging behind that of girls. The action being taken to improve boys' achievement is having some success. However, some of this has had the effect of raising girls' achievement more rapidly and therefore widening the gap in performance.
4. Achievement is good in virtually all subjects in Years 7 to 11. The main exceptions to this are the very good achievement in design and technology in Years 10 and 11 and the satisfactory achievement throughout the school in mathematics and science. Achievement is also satisfactory in citizenship and religious education in Years 7 to 9. The good achievement is leading to rising standards in many subjects. Standards are at least average in all subjects and are above average in music throughout the school, in information and communication technology in Year 9, and in art and design, geography, modern foreign languages and physical education in Year 11. Standards are above average in design and technology in Year 9 and well above average in Year 11. In the past, mathematics had been the more successful of the core subjects; however, this has now changed because of the more rapid progress made in improving provision in English and science.
5. The standard of work seen from the majority of students with special educational needs is below average across all year groups. However, students make very good attempts at all topics and with very good teaching and very good classroom support,

these students achieve very well. Highly effective work is being undertaken to extend gifted and talented students' achievement in the performing arts and physical education. This is meeting with much success and is one reason that students state for liking these areas. Work in other areas is in its infancy and is not yet able to demonstrate tangible results, although the extension groups in English, mathematics and science in Years 10 and 11 provide highly challenging teaching to highly motivated students. There is no discernible variation in the achievement of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

## Sixth form

6. Examination results in the sixth form have fluctuated over the last three years and are lower than at the time of the last inspection. This is due partly to the fact that the group of students at the last inspection were required to have higher GCSE results to enter A Level courses than is the case now. Furthermore, the most recent A Level results were from a relatively weak group of students who entered the sixth form with few A\* and A grades between them. Overall results in 2004 fell slightly and were below average. An above average proportion of students entered at A Level received a pass grade, although the proportion of the highest A and B grades fell and was considerably below average. However, these results represented at least satisfactory progress overall given the low prior attainment of this group. Female students gained much better results than their male colleagues at AS Level, A Level and in advanced vocational courses. However, this difference was a reflection of differences in earlier GCSE performance.
7. A Level results rose substantially in physical education in 2004 and were well above average. Results were above average in English literature and music and in line with the national average in most other subjects. The exceptions to this were the below average results in information and communication technology, art, media studies and geography and the well below results in business studies, physics and French. Performing arts advanced vocational results were also well below average.

### **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	96.3 (94.4)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	25.3 (29.3)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	226.6 (224.9)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 78 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

8. As in the main school, the very good overall quality of the teaching and the students' positive approach to their studies are the major contributory factors in their good achievement. This ensures that standards rise from below average on entry - a consequence of the comparatively low GCSE requirements set by the school for entry to A Level courses - to average overall by Year 13. This is an improvement over the previous year. Achievement is good in most subjects and is very good in English, music and leisure and recreation. Standards are well above average by Year 13 in music, above average in English, art, business studies and physical education. The very few students in the sixth form with special educational needs achieve at similar levels to their peers.

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

Students' attendance and punctuality in both the main school and sixth form are good. In the main school, attitudes and behaviour are good and these improve in the sixth form to very good. Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students are proud of their school and enjoy taking part in all the opportunities provided.
- Relationships between students and with adults are good and the school deals very well with any forms of harassment.
- The school has rigorous procedures for monitoring absence and improving attendance.
- The maturity of students contributes well to the school's positive atmosphere for learning.

**Commentary**

9. Students enjoy attending school and like the friendly atmosphere. They speak highly of their teachers and say that lessons are interesting and fun. Many say that they particularly enjoy lessons with a more practical content such as art and design, design and technology and science. They recognise that teachers have a high level of subject expertise and appreciate the very good quality of the teaching they receive. There is a wide range of after-school clubs, such as drama, chess, football and homework, which students enjoy. Many students also support the school's charitable fundraising and other activities, which serve the community. A broad range of charities benefits from the school's fundraising efforts and provides a valuable reminder to students of those less fortunate than themselves. Students particularly appreciate the way that teachers are always willing to give up their time in order to help with any personal or academic problems. Students trust their teachers and feel valued as individuals. The friendly and supportive atmosphere makes a major contribution to their commitment to their studies.

**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	1560	150	3
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	7	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	8	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	15	2	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	47	0	0

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

10. Most teachers have high expectations of behaviour and most students know exactly what they should and should not do. Consequently, behaviour has improved since the

last inspection. During discussions, students said that there is little bullying or racism and that the school deals very effectively with any that does occur. The school encourages good behaviour through commendations and rewards and students who have behaved particularly well may receive recognition in assembly or in newsletters. In a small number of the observed lessons, a significant minority of students lacked self confidence and this impeded the progress they subsequently made. However, as much of the teaching observed was good or better, the impact on other students was minimal and behaviour in the lessons was usually good. The school is committed to ensuring that all students are in full-time education and the Ocean Centre provides very effective support for students who are experiencing difficulties. Nevertheless, the challenging behaviour of some students inevitably leads to exclusion from school. The number of permanent exclusions is below average for a school of this size. The school monitors closely all exclusions and involves parents as much as possible in order to prevent such behaviour recurring. The apparently high number of exclusions of students of Pakistani backgrounds was due to the repeated exclusion of a student who has now left the school.

11. At the time of the previous inspection, attendance was satisfactory. Over the intervening six years it has improved and is now good. The school has introduced rigorous systems to monitor student punctuality and attendance and parents are contacted on the first day if no explanation is given for their child's absence. The home-school agreement sets out the school's expectations very clearly and the school works closely with the education welfare officer and other support agencies when students fail to meet the school's expectations. Those who attend well are rewarded with commendations and recognition in assemblies and in newsletters. The majority of parents understand the need for regular attendance and respond well whenever the school contacts them about their child's attendance or punctuality. Although parents are strongly discouraged from booking family holidays during the term a few continue to do so. For their part, students are keen to attend school regularly and they enjoy being praised if their attendance and punctuality have been especially good.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.9	School data	0.9
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.*

12. Students' good personal development is reflected in their mature approach to work and the readiness with which they respect each other's feelings and needs. They understand and appreciate the difference between right and wrong and, over the years, become increasingly aware of how their actions affect others. Students care for each other, co-operate well and a number participate in charitable fundraising. Their strong empathy with, and compassion for, victims of a recent major disaster led to students joining with other schools to organise events that raised substantial funds for the Indian Ocean Tsunami appeal.

**Sixth form**

13. Around half of the students in Year 11 stay on into the sixth form and they are joined by students from other schools. Students in the sixth form are strongly committed to learning and have very positive attitudes towards school. They particularly appreciate

the wide range of courses and vocational opportunities available and feel they match their career aspirations well. During discussions, they spoke well of their teachers and felt that they make lessons interesting through their energy, commitment and subject knowledge. Students' very positive attitudes are exemplified by their good attendance and their focus and concentration. In addition, students play a very active part in many aspects of school life, providing help in lessons, organising and participating in musical and other events and raising funds for charity. Students also act as mentors for Year 7 students and, as part of their coursework, organise very successful day trips for large groups of younger students. They serve as very good role models, although the split site limits the opportunities to meet and mix with some of the younger students.

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

The quality of education is very good overall and contributes to the students' good achievement throughout the school. Much teaching is engaging and focused well on meeting the individual needs of the students. Assessment practice is thorough and information is used well to guide teaching and learning. The curriculum is constantly under review and has been adapted creatively to provide courses that meet the aspirations and interests of the students. The school successfully ensures the students welfare is high on the agenda and provides valuable advice and guidance to support the students' academic and personal development. The students' views on school developments are sought and valued. Highly productive links have been established with parents, the local community and other educational institutions which significantly benefit the students; the school is continually seeking ways to strengthen these links further.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are very good overall and are more effective from Years 10 to 13 than in Years 7 to 9. Assessment and its use to support the students' learning is good overall and it is very good in the sixth form.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers are confident in their knowledge of the lesson material, which they teach in a confident manner trying with success to engage the students in their learning.
- Relationships between teachers and students are conducive to supporting learning, although a small but significant number of students do not take sufficient responsibility for their learning.
- Teachers very successfully focus on meeting the needs of students with special educational needs and are beginning to use strategies to extend and challenge the potentially most able.
- The use of assessment has improved significantly since the last inspection and is an important part of the school's determination to involve students in improving their learning.

### **Commentary**

#### ***Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 185 lessons***

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9 (5%)	46 (25%)	87 (47%)	39 (21%)	4 (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.*

14. Teaching and learning have improved considerably since the last inspection because of the priority placed on developing teachers' skills throughout the school. As a result, many of the lessons of a large number of teachers are regularly well taught and focus sharply on the learning of all students. Improving teaching and learning remains a key priority for the school, with action taken and training provided having a significant and continuing impact. Any significant remaining weaknesses are where teachers talk too much and do not require sufficient from the students who can become bored and disinterested.
15. Teachers generally not only have secure levels of subject expertise but also have a good understanding of the most effective way material can be taught so that learning can be maximised. The structure and guidance of the national strategy to support learning in Years 7 to 9 has been adopted and implemented successfully including in Years 10 and 11. Lesson planning is built securely on thorough schemes of work in virtually all subjects. Most teachers plan activities at different levels to meet the various needs of the students in their classes; however, this is not always the case. For example, teachers in mathematics rely too heavily on setting arrangements and do not consistently match methods and materials well to the needs of the students, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
16. Many teachers successfully apply methods and techniques that are seen more commonly in performing arts subjects. Their lessons are lively and active with students continually expected to participate in a variety of ways. Consequently, most students are confident at giving answers in front of the class, performing to an audience, taking part in role-play activities or working productively in pairs and small groups. Some very good use is also made of new technology to make lessons more interesting or to support the students' learning; however, this is not fully consistent across the school and is rather dependent on the confidence and skill of the individual teacher. Strong and productive relationships have been established in many classrooms. Students are encouraged to participate and their actions are praised and valued giving them confidence and a feeling of security. A key feature of many classrooms is that students are given the skills to take responsibility for their own learning and are keen to meet targets and to be successful. In spite of the consistent work of teachers in this area, a small but significant number of students - mostly boys - have low aspirations and do not push themselves sufficiently. They are willing to accept the minimum and as a consequence do not achieve all that they might and do not make the progress of others in their classes.
17. Teaching of students with special educational needs is very effective and is leading to very good learning. Support groups for literacy and numeracy are characterised by very careful preparation, patiently delivered and productive support and excellent student-teacher relations. Departments plan well for students with special educational needs through varied tasks and activities and good use of the teaching assistants. Teachers generally take reasonable account of the needs of students capable of high standards by providing work and utilising methods that challenge and extend. However, this is most effective in the top ability sets in Years 10 and 11 in English, mathematics and science where the teaching is lively, inspirational and extends the students' thinking and knowledge considerably. Elsewhere, work is at early stages of development in providing programmes for students identified as gifted and talented. Where this has been a feature for some time such as in physical education and the

performing arts, the students are highly motivated and report that they see the challenge provided as a major reason why they like the subjects.

18. Teachers know their students well and monitor their attitudes and progress very carefully. Good computer-based systems are in place to provide staff with easy access to detailed assessment information about students' attainment, effort and progress. Information is regularly shared with the students themselves and with parents, who are encouraged to comment on their children's reports. The school has developed good systems for setting targets for individual students. These are well used in most departments and the effectiveness of each department's use of assessment is monitored as part of the school's commitment to self-review. In religious education, mathematics, citizenship and business studies the use of assessment to improve learning is satisfactory and in all other subjects it is at least good. Marking is constructive and thorough and students know how well they are doing and what to do to improve. Teachers often refer to assessment criteria for the subject in commenting on students' written work and in lessons. In a Year 7 drama class, for example, students could assess their own work in a lesson against nationally agreed Arts Council level descriptors.

### **Sixth form**

19. Teaching in the sixth form has many of the more effective characteristics seen in lessons in the main part of the school. A high proportion of lessons are very well taught and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. The structure of lessons that has been developed successfully in the main school also works very effectively in the sixth form. Teachers plan with clear objectives which they share and discuss with the students. This gives them a clear picture of what they will be learning and enables teacher and students to evaluate success in meeting the objectives by the end of the lesson. The very good subject knowledge of many of the most successful teachers is used well to generate lively discussions and to respond well when students find difficulty with an idea or concept. A wide variety of methods are adopted so that learning can develop and be reinforced. Pair and group work is used very effectively to ensure that students are fully involved and teachers are skilled at the timing and content of their interventions. Questioning is used very well to develop and draw out ideas from the students and to confirm what they know and can do.
20. Where students have become over dependent on their teachers in Years 10 and 11, the change to the challenge and independence required in the sixth form has proved a shock. However, many teachers take account of this through carefully planned introductory programmes at the start of Year 12. Assessment is used more effectively in the sixth form than in the main school and is a major contributory factor in the progress that students make. Teachers and students have a very clear picture of how well they are doing, what their targets are and how they can be achieved. Lesson planning, marking and feedback focus sharply on what individual students need to do to improve. Teachers know the students well and go out of their way to provide help and advice during and outside lesson time. This is much valued by the students.

### **The curriculum**

The school provides a suitably broad curriculum in the main school and in the sixth form that caters well for the individual needs of students and reflects its status as a specialist performing arts college. The curriculum is enriched through a very good range of additional opportunities. Accommodation and resources are good.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school has developed an innovative curriculum for 14 to 16 year-old students.
- The needs of students with special educational needs are met very well.
- Statutory requirements are not met for religious education and collective worship and there are limited opportunities to promote the students' personal development in the sixth form.
- A wide range of clubs and activities are enthusiastically taken up by students.

## **Commentary**

21. Statutory requirements are met in Years 7 to 9, but are not met in Years 10 and 11 because the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education are not met at present. Plans are well advanced to meet requirements for the next academic year. The curriculum supports and encourages the students' personal development well, despite not consistently providing a daily act of collective worship. Much is achieved through a well-planned personal, social and health education programme. Careers education is good and supported by Connexions staff. Consequently, the preparation of students for their next stage of education, training or employment is good.
22. Students begin to be offered some choice in Year 9. This provides time for a second foreign language for more able linguists and allows students to develop their interests in the expressive arts and within technology. In Years 10 and 11, higher-attaining students are offered extension activities in English and mathematics and the opportunity to study the three sciences. Other students are offered an innovative alternative education programme in collaboration with other local providers. This includes a range of vocational qualifications, work placements and a well run programme focusing on developing the students' social, personal and life skills. This wide range of opportunities ensures that the curriculum meets individual needs very well and ensures equality of opportunity for all to succeed.
23. The school's broad curriculum meets the needs of students with special educational needs very effectively and allows them to achieve very well. The very wide spectrum of need is very well understood and catered for with a range of alternative programmes of learning, withdrawal classes and dedicated classroom support. In Years 7, 8 and 9 an identified group of students receive specialist support in smaller classes and additional support for literacy and numeracy. The Ocean Centre provides a highly effective short-term intervention programme for students for whom work in mainstream classes proves difficult.
24. A very good range of enrichment opportunities are offered to students. The school provides a wide range of clubs and activities, particularly in performing arts and sport. These are enthusiastically taken up by boys and girls alike. Subjects provide a range of extra revision classes and clubs. The range of activities in music is extensive and full scale productions are regularly organised. Additional provision specifically for gifted and talented students is developing, with a highly effective focus in the performing arts and physical education. Visits to France and Spain are offered to each year group studying the language. Recently introduced changes to the provision for able students in English, mathematics and science in Years 10 and 11 have the

potential to extend provision well and promote the higher achievement of these students.

25. Accommodation is good, but with some weaknesses. Design and technology facilities on the Mill Road site are unsatisfactory and sports facilities on both campuses require upgrading. Increasing popularity of the performing arts is placing strains on accommodation in this area and some upgrading of science facilities is also required. The learning and information centre on the Farnbridge Road site is a very good resource. Travel between the two campuses is kept to a minimum, so that there is little adverse impact on teaching and learning. Resources are good across the school, with information and communication technology provision above average, although some equipment, such as in modern foreign languages, is dated. The match of staffing to the curriculum is good, although at the time of the inspection there were no specialist teachers of religious education. The school has a very good record of developing new teachers and those in training. The number and quality of support staff is good and they make a substantial contribution to the students' learning.

### **Sixth Form**

26. The school operates a wide range of sixth form courses, with a good mix of academic and vocational courses on offer. These courses meet well the needs and aspirations of those students who choose to continue their studies in school. They also provide effective continuity from the main school. Nevertheless, the school continues to strive to improve its offer; for example, there are well developed plans to develop provision for its most able mathematicians.
27. A range of enrichment activities continues to be offered, although religious education is not provided for all students and there is no requirement to engage in physical education. Explicit time for all students to develop their personal, social, health and citizenship skills is limited at present. Good support continues to be provided to students in preparing them for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
28. Accommodation for the sixth form is very good, providing areas for study of good size, quantity and quality. The very good library also has dedicated areas for sixth form use. The match of teachers' experience and expertise to the curriculum is good.

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

Provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. Students in the main school and sixth form receive very good support, advice and guidance. The school involves students very well in its development through seeking and acting on their views.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school knows its students very well and this helps it to spot and deal with any problems at an early stage.
- The school actively seeks students' views and acts upon them whenever possible.
- Sensitive and very well planned transfer procedures help students get off to a very good start at the beginning of Year 7.
- Students are very well advised on their future study options.
- Health, safety, and child protection procedures are effective.



## Commentary

29. Some students face challenging circumstances, which can significantly affect their learning and ability to achieve. The school recognises this and, working with a very wide range of support services, has developed a comprehensive framework of pastoral care. In addition, the school's Ocean Centre is highly successful at supporting students with behavioural or other difficulties. Learning mentors provide very good support for students who have particular problems or abilities. Feedback from those mentored has been used to guide the planning of revision classes provided by the school. The school closely evaluates the impact of all the strategies it employs to ensure that they are as effective as possible and are geared towards meeting the students' needs. During discussions, students confirm that the school knows them well and that they know of someone whom they can approach in confidence to discuss any concerns. Systems for tracking students' academic progress are very thorough and assessment information is put to very good use when planning what students do next. Homework is issued according to the homework timetable, is promptly marked and students receive very clear guidance on how to improve the standard of their work. This network of care and support meets students' needs very closely and this puts them in a strong position to make very good progress in their learning.
30. Elected students help to run class and school councils and they have a very effective voice in the running and future development of the school. The distinct roles of class and school council representatives ensure that the opportunity to contribute actively to the life of the school is given to as many students as possible. Meetings are held regularly, and representatives solicit views from and provide feedback to students during tutor time. On occasion, council members also contribute to school assemblies. Students participate in school council nominated charitable initiatives and have raised substantial funds for these. The school seeks students' views regularly on matters such as transfer arrangements and mentoring. Students also contribute to the process of appointing staff. During discussions, students say that the school values their views highly and takes them fully into account when planning for the future.
31. The school works very closely with local primary schools and students are very well prepared for their move at the start of Year 7. Students from primary schools attend drama and musical events and this helps them to become familiar with the school before they transfer. The school also hosts activity weeks where Year 7 students act as guides for visiting Year 5 students. Teachers visit each contributing primary school to talk to staff and Year 6 students. They also meet parents and provide opportunities to ask questions and discuss any concerns. As there is a split site, the school also recognises the need to prepare Year 8 students for the move to Year 9. The school hosts a transition week during summer term at the Fambridge Road site where lessons and a range of activities provide a very good introduction to life in Year 9. Wherever possible, heads of year and form tutors stay with the year group throughout their time in the main school. During discussions, Year 7 and Year 9 students confirmed that they felt very well prepared for their moves and quickly settled in to life at their respective sites.
32. The school provides very good guidance to students about their future choices. Written information is very clear and well timed and options evenings provide valuable opportunities to discuss choices in more detail. Students confirm that they are very happy with, and value, the advice they receive.

33. Procedures for ensuring students' health and safety are very effective. There is a clear policy and members of staff and governors have a good understanding of their individual responsibilities. Risk assessments are thorough and several members of staff are trained in first aid. Child protection and medical procedures are comprehensive; school systems for recording incidents are effective and records are complete and up-to-date. The school promotes healthy living well and students are pleased with the quality of food in the canteen. During discussions, a number of students criticised the state of the toilets on the upper school site. The school stated that it plans to tackle these concerns, but has yet to inform the students.

### **Sixth form**

34. The provision of care, guidance and support in the sixth form is very good. Students have access to a wide range of support and guidance both for their academic studies as well as for their personal development. They appreciate the access to teachers. A strong team of tutors monitor the students' progress and academic targets closely and work with individuals on a regular basis during tutor periods. The very well-stocked library has a separate floor for students to work on. Advice on entry to the sixth form and their career and higher education choices is very well planned and virtually all students are able to follow their chosen subjects.
35. Students have very good opportunities to express their views and concerns and appreciate being treated as adults. However, there is no formal timetabled session to develop students' wider personal and learning skills or to follow a formal course of personal, social and health education. Preparation for the next stage of education or for finding a job is good. All students have access to careers advice through interviews with the careers advisor. Advice is readily available for preparing their curriculum vitae and filling in application forms. The careers' library is well stocked with useful information about academic and vocational courses. Students have open access to these resources and they are well used.

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

The school has very good links with parents, the community and other schools and colleges.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school keeps parents very well informed about its work and their child's learning.
- Parents are very well supported and they think highly of the school.
- Strong links with the community promote students' personal development very well.
- Extensive links with other schools and colleges enrich the curriculum and support students' achievement.

### **Commentary**

36. This is a dynamic and oversubscribed school, which enjoys a very good reputation in the local community. It works very hard to keep parents well informed about its work and their children's progress. Weekly newsletters are very informative and celebrate students' academic achievements as well as those in areas such as sport, voluntary and charitable work. Student planners are very well used to keep parent and school in touch with one another. The school website is a valuable information source to both current and prospective parents. Detailed termly progress reports are comprehensive

and provide a very good picture of each child and how well they are doing. The annual report also includes clear information on the extent of their involvement in school life. Parents' evenings are very well attended and members of staff will always try to make time to see individual parents if they have any specific concerns.

37. The school is aware that some of the parents face particularly challenging circumstances and that they find it difficult to support their child's education. The school has responded by establishing close links with other organisations who offer counselling, health and other support services. Parents appreciate the courses provided which help them to support their child's education and the time given by staff to address their concerns. The school also holds meetings to support parents of students at particular points in their education. These include termly target-setting for all years, transition evenings for Year 8 to Year 9 and options evenings for Year 9 and those planning to enter the sixth form. As a result, parents feel very well supported and this confirms the positive comments made during the pre-inspection meeting.
38. Students undertake a wide variety of community activities, which have helped to raise the profile of the school. Sporting links are extensive and students regularly and successfully compete in a wide range of sports at local and regional level. Their musical, dance and drama performances at local events and festivals have been commended through awards and grateful letters of thanks. Through their work in the community, students have raised large sums of money for good causes. Clubs, adult education and childcare make extensive use of the school premises and sporting facilities. Members of the community contribute to a very well established and nationally accredited mentoring programme and provide valuable support to students with particular difficulties or abilities. Businesses and the community were very supportive of the school's specialist status college bid, adding to the considerable sum already raised by the students themselves.
39. As a specialist performing arts college, the school explores a range of opportunities to engage and interest students, parents and the wider community. Strong curricular links with primary schools help to ensure that incoming students are very well prepared for their transfer at the end of Year 6. Staff and students visit contributing primary schools to entertain and enlighten, through concerts and workshops and through specialist training and support to staff. Students from primary schools also visit the school to attend school productions, sporting events and the school's induction days. Strong links with nearby colleges of further education provide students with vocational opportunities in Years 10 and 11 and as a result, students are in a good position to decide what they want to do after Year 11.

### **Sixth form**

40. The school has extensive links with several colleges of further education. These provide very good support to the school's wide range of vocational and work-related opportunities. Partner colleges provide valuable mock interview practice for students and senior members of staff also benefit from these links as they provide a useful forum for professional discussions. Close collaboration with employers provides students with opportunities for extended learning. Through this increased choice and range of opportunity, the school strongly encourages students to continue in higher education.
41. Students participate in voluntary projects and events, in the community and local schools and hospitals. These may be initiated through the school or sixth form council

or form part of students' coursework. Students have performed at local primary schools and have worked with a local professional football club to organise a visit for students attending a local special school. These activities provide valuable practical support for the community and schools involved, contribute to the students' coursework and promote their development as responsible citizens.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are very good overall. Governance is good. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent. Other members of staff with key responsibilities provide very good leadership. Management systems are very effective. The sixth form is very effectively led and managed.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher provides a very clear educational direction for the school based on raising achievement and improving teaching and learning.
- There is a strong commitment for ensuring that all students can benefit from what the school has to offer so that they can find success wherever their skills and aptitudes lie.
- The school has developed highly effective systems to review, monitor and evaluate the work of staff and their success in meeting priorities for improvement.
- Training and the further professional development of staff are focused very sharply on meeting individual and organisational aims and priorities.
- The governing body has very thorough systems to shape the school's direction and monitor its progress; however, it has not managed to ensure that all statutory responsibilities are fully met.

### **Commentary**

42. The headteacher is a highly effective leader and has been instrumental in the progress made by the school since the last inspection. She is highly regarded by parents, students, staff and governors as well as by others in the wider community. She has maintained the drive to improve teaching and learning as a main key to raising achievement as a constant priority. The headteacher has high expectations of the staff and works with much success to ensure that they are met. Where they fall short of these expectations, action is taken to improve performance. Other senior members of staff have roles that are very sharply focused on the areas identified as priorities for improvement. They fulfil these roles very well as do other key staff with management and leadership responsibilities. There is a strong sense of teamwork across the school. Members of staff have a common understanding of what the main school priorities are and work hard to generate consistency in their work. The quality of the leadership at all levels places the school in a very strong position to secure further improvements.
43. Provision for students with special educational needs is very well led and managed. The school also uses its curriculum creatively to ensure that opportunities are available for all students, whatever their interests and skills. This has reduced disaffection amongst some groups and has resulted in an improved atmosphere in many classes. The Ocean Centre is a very well organised facility and makes a significant contribution to the achievement of the students attached to it. Gifted and talented provision is less far advanced other than in the performing arts and physical education where it makes a significant contribution to the students' achievement.

However, recently introduced arrangements to challenge the most capable Year 10 and 11 students have much to commend them. A race equality policy is in place and outcomes carefully monitored. The small number of minority ethnic students are catered for very well as are traveller children and those in the care of the local authority.

44. The school has developed thorough and robust systems to review its work and the work of faculties. It has become sharply self-evaluative and has very secure mechanisms for identifying its strengths and where developments are needed. Members of staff are very reflective of their practice and are keen to bring about improvements. Faculties have developed rigorous systems to review their work, which include seeking the views of students. The senior leadership team acts to validate judgements so that there is a common understanding across the school of how consistent judgements can be made. These self-reviews are largely accurate and are used well to inform future planning. However, the systems and structures are not being used as effectively as they might to bring about improvements in mathematics. A wide range of examination and other data is carefully analysed to evaluate how well groups of students are doing as well as to highlight aspects for faculty improvement. All of these processes are sharply focused on meeting the school's priorities. The result is that there is a clear understanding of where strengths and weaknesses lie and how well the school is doing in trying to raise achievement and meet its educational priorities. Improvement planning is then based carefully on the evidence from the review systems. Future planning is strategic as well as looking closely at annual short-term areas for development and is a valuable tool for aiding the school's improvement.
45. Systems to support the continued development of staff are strong and robust. There are well thought-out structures and strategies to ensure that the best classroom practice is identified and used to support the development of others. Teachers have the opportunity to observe and learn from others who may have particular skills such as in the use of new technology or in the effectiveness with which they review learning at the end of a lesson. Faculty meetings are used very effectively to promote and develop teaching priorities such as the development of literacy or providing challenge for gifted and talented students. The school is highly effective in its support for teachers who are new to the profession. It is also highly thought of for the work it does with trainee teachers.
46. The governing body is also very well led by a highly effective chair of governors and chairs of its committees. There is a high level of expertise within the governing body and a good understanding of how their role should be undertaken. Governors are fully involved in identifying the key strategic priorities for the school's improvement. They also have very thorough procedures for monitoring specific aspects of the school each year. Regular presentations to their committees by school staff as well as visits to see the school at work are used very well to extend their expertise. Their understanding of the school's strengths and shortcomings is well-informed, honest and accurate. They are also very clear about what areas need developing and the steps to be taken. Because of this, they can question and are professionally challenging of the headteacher and senior staff, having high expectations of them. At the same time, they use their offices very well to support the school in meeting its aims. However, they have not managed to ensure that requirements for religious education are met. This is a pragmatic decision based on staffing problems, which appear to have been resolved for the forthcoming year. The act of collective worship is another requirement that is not being met. Financial planning is thorough and aimed sharply

at meeting the school's main priorities for development. Best value principles are used well to ensure that value for money is obtained from funding decisions.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	7,136,345	Balance from previous year	317,054
Total expenditure	7,111,769	Balance carried forward to the next	341,630
Expenditure per student	4,425		

**Sixth form**

47. There is a clear vision for developing the sixth form and improving the support for students with an explicit focus on raising attainment and achievement levels across all subjects. A team of dedicated tutors are led with commitment and enthusiasm and work closely with the head of sixth form to ensure a consistent and caring but challenging approach when dealing with sixth form students. Subject and individual student performance are monitored and evaluated very effectively and are a focus for regular meetings with faculty heads and tutors. Very good use is being made of electronic systems to record student information; this is currently being developed further to include individual target setting. Governance is good and has similar qualities in the sixth form as in the main school with a clear focus on supporting development and monitoring provision.

## **WORK RELATED LEARNING**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students are prepared well for the next stages of their education or training through well-planned careers guidance.
- The alternative approaches being taken to the curriculum from Year 10 upwards are providing good opportunities for some students to pursue vocational courses and work place learning.
- There are many opportunities for students to develop an understanding of the skills for work related learning, but these would benefit from more coherent planning across Years 10 and 11.

### **Commentary**

48. The quality of provision to prepare students in the main school for the next stage of education is good. For the majority of students it is delivered through a well-planned personal, health and social education programme planned and overseen by the co-ordinator for work related learning. There is additional input in all years, from careers advisory staff. Good provision is made for careers education with a well-appointed resource room and an advisor available for two days each week. The external careers advisor is fully involved with school activities including attending the Year 9 options evening during the inspection week. All Year 11 students are interviewed with follow-up sessions by request. Students make very positive comments about careers' advice.
49. All students participate in a useful programme of work experience for two weeks in Year 10. For the first time this year the school is to host a job fair as part of the school day. This will ensure that most students attend and gain knowledge and understanding of local employers' expectations.
50. Vocational studies and the alternative education programme are strengths of the present provision. The smile on the face of one student, who has secured a job at Longleat Safari Park, is testimony to the success of the Ocean Centre in providing appropriate work related learning activities for students on the alternative curriculum. The school co-ordinator recognises the need to monitor and evaluate the impact of work related learning on the wider school community such as after major events like the job fair. Currently, there has been no audit of work related learning activities in subject areas or a mapping across the curriculum of visits to work places.

## **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**

- Excellent leadership and management are enabling a strong team of teachers to work very productively in raising standards and promoting enjoyment of the subject.
- Students have a consistent experience of English because teachers have worked together to create stimulating units of work within a balanced framework.
- High quality teaching and a conviction that students can always improve have been instrumental in raising achievement.
- Positive and detailed marking enables students to understand how well they are doing and how to make further progress.
- An excellent range of extra-curricular activities meets the needs of students of all abilities and has a positive effect on their learning.

##### **Commentary**

51. In the 2004 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, standards were above the national average and results were higher than at the time of the last inspection. These results compared favourably with those of students in similar schools. Students performed better in English than in mathematics and science. Results were considerably better in 2004 than in 2003, when they were lower than usual, and better than in the previous three years overall. The 2004 results represented good progress between the start of Year 7 and the end of Year 9. Higher-attaining students did particularly well and girls' performance was better than that of boys'. The difference in their results has been greater than differences nationally in recent years. Results in the GCSE examination have also risen since the last inspection. In 2004 the percentage of students gaining grades A\* to C in English was in line with the national figure, although once again the difference between boys and girls was noticeable. Girls here performed as well at this level as girls elsewhere in English and almost as well in literature. Boys' performance was below boys' results nationally in both examinations. Overall the students' results in English at GCSE in 2004 were lower than their results in other subjects.
52. Work seen during the inspection, both in books and in lessons, clearly reflects the rise in standards for Years 7 to 9. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. Students achieve well, from below average attainment on entry, because teaching is energetic and consistent and conveys both high expectations and encouragement for individuals. Standards are average by Years 9 and 11. Students with special educational needs make good progress because they are well supported and teachers pay attention to their individual needs. Higher-attaining students are always challenged and have good opportunities to develop their talents both within lessons and through extra-curricular activities. The lower school library and information centre makes an important contribution here and is also very effective in

supporting the reading development of students of all abilities. The English team have designed a curriculum that is meeting the needs of the full ability range of students and is planned in considerable detail. The choice of topics, texts and classroom activities caters well for both boys and girls. Boys are making good progress because teachers are very aware of what motivates them and have developed a good range of classroom activities for this. The arrangement of seating girls and boys next to one another in class generally works well in creating a purposeful atmosphere and students make good use of the regular opportunities for discussion in small groups. Teachers create these groups with care in order to maximise students' potential for challenging and supporting one another. This planned group work prepares them very effectively for answering questions and developing their ideas further as a whole class. There are also many opportunities before and after school and during the lunch hour for students to improve their reading and writing and their success in examinations at the end of Year 9. The department monitors attendance at these sessions, which are well attended and are helping to raise standards, particularly among a small group of under-achieving boys.

53. Many of the strategies which have successfully raised the attainment of younger students are also used to good effect in GCSE classes. Detailed and constructive marking and target setting gives students an accurate picture of their progress. Students are well informed about how this relates to the GCSE grades they are aiming for. Thorough assessment and lively, well-focused teaching are driving up standards in Years 10 and 11. Work seen in Year 11 during the inspection, in speaking and listening, reading and writing indicates a higher level of attainment overall and more students working at the level of grades A\* to C than in the 2004 cohort. Those students in the top set and aiming for the highest grades are extremely well motivated and articulate. They have a wide vocabulary for discussing writers' techniques and their response as readers. They learn rapidly and confidently in response to very stimulating teaching. Small groups of the lowest attaining students are also making good progress with their English courses in the Ocean Centre because of skilled and supportive teaching.
54. Throughout all year groups standards of speaking and listening are generally high because teachers emphasise the importance of these skills and make students aware of how they contribute to improving learning, both their own and that of the class as a whole. They contribute willingly and most listen carefully to their teachers and one another.
55. Students' reading skills are developing well. They work hard to find meanings beyond the literal – in Year 9 work on Shakespeare, for example - and are helped to do so by carefully planned lessons which offer a variety of activities. Higher attaining students in Year 9 read blank verse aloud accurately and expressively. Reflecting the national picture, students from Year 9 onwards, read less widely in their own time than when they were younger, but teachers are having some success in promoting individual reading through their own enthusiasms, attractive displays, book clubs and reading records. Almost all students enter for GCSE literature and those who continue their study of English in the sixth form start the course with positive attitudes which teachers have carefully fostered in the main school.
56. Developing students' writing skills has been a key focus for much of the work of the department and this is reflected in the range and increasing control in students' writing by Year 9 and in examples of self-assessment. Coursework folders show older students making good progress from Year 10 to 11 in response to teachers'

comments which link targets to grade criteria, particularly at the grade C/D borderline and in working towards grade A/A\*. Students of all abilities enjoy opportunities for shaping and discussing original writing.

57. The department is steadily increasing the use of information and communication technology in lessons to support students' reading and writing development. In a Year 8 lesson students responded well to images on a wireless laptop as a stimulus for writing poems on the potential of water as a life-sustaining or a destructive force; middle-attaining Year 9 students enjoyed using images on an electronic whiteboard to explore patterns of imagery in *Macbeth*. Schemes of work in each year group require all students to use ICT every term.
58. Through the faculty structure, the department is outstandingly well led by a creative and energetic head of English. She combines day-to-day organisational skills with a capacity to reflect on wider issues and an enthusiasm for the subject. She understands how to make school priorities work at department level, handles innovation confidently and supports new staff and trainee teachers very effectively. She has been very successful in building a committed, productive and harmonious team and valuing their individual and collective strengths. Consequently, there have been many improvements since the last inspection. Results have improved as a result of the increased school and department focus on using assessment to improve learning. Boys are working more successfully in response to strategies and teaching approaches which meet their needs. Students now have a sharper understanding of what they are doing and where it is leading. The literacy strategy has had a significant impact in improving students' writing. The National Key Stage 3 strategy has contributed to higher quality teaching, not just in Years 7 to 9 but in GCSE and in the Sixth Form. This has been a contributory factor in the very good improvement since the last inspection.

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

59. The school takes seriously the development of literacy as part of its commitment to improving learning and provision is good. The literacy policy is kept under review and a detailed audit of its effectiveness early in 2005 has provided the co-ordinator and senior managers with evidence of what has been achieved, as well as some new areas for development. A well conceived programme for extending staff and student awareness of literacy issues is planned. An active concern to raise levels of literacy can be seen in most subject areas. The decision to encourage staff to concentrate on writing first of all, as a key strategy for raising attainment, is reflected in marking, in the widespread use of displays of subject and general language, in the use of writing frames and in teachers' emphasis on important terms. These approaches have made an impact on students' written work and levels of literacy are adequate to support their learning in other subjects or subjects across the curriculum. In some subjects, such as English, geography and modern languages, students display good listening skills and a willingness to take part in role plays. The learning and information centre in the lower school makes an important contribution to reading development through joint work with the English department, and through displays and activities. The upper school learning and information centre is a good resource area for students but is currently somewhat under-used within lesson time as a means of developing students' reading and retrieval skills in a planned and systematic way.

### **Modern foreign languages**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards fell two years ago, but improved in 2004, when students achieved better in French than in the average for all their other subjects.
- Students make good progress in all year groups because they are well taught.
- The department is very well led and there is very good teamwork.

### **Commentary**

60. GCSE examination results in French in 2004 were above average. Boys' and girls' results were above the national averages for their genders by similar amounts. Too few candidates took Spanish for valid national comparisons to be made. Following a dip in results in 2003, the department has started to return to the rising trend, which took place after the appointment of the current head of department. Students entered for French in 2004 achieved better results in this subject than they did in the average for all their other subjects. Standards assessed by teachers at the end of Year 9 are accurate and above average. The gap between girls' and boys' results in Year 9 was a little wider than that seen nationally, but it was less than in 2003. The proportion of students reaching the higher levels of attainment has increased and is now in line with national expectations. Students achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 to 11 because the level of challenge is high and they are keen to do well.
61. Teaching and learning are good and standards throughout the main school are above average. Teachers use the foreign language throughout all lessons. There is a variety of activity and good pace. Classrooms are well decorated with useful information and examples of students' work. Students of all ability levels, including those with special educational needs, learn well because they receive constant encouragement from their teachers. Teachers use assessment procedures consistently well and students know how well they are getting on and what they need to do to improve. Older students appreciate the opportunities they have to assess their own progress and marking is thorough, conscientious and helpful in Years 10 and 11. Sometimes, opportunities are missed to adjust the level of work in class so that it suits the needs of different groups of students in Years 7 to 9.
62. Leadership and management are very good. The department works together very well as a team, sharing tasks, with everyone contributing for example to the organisation of visits to France and Spain, which are of great benefit. Policies and practice are consistent. Very good links with parents include the organisation of social activities and the views of students are canvassed. The department is innovative, enabling students in Years 12 and 13 to act as mentors to students in Year 11 taking GCSE. The head of department monitors the students' assessment results and is aware of areas to develop. Members of the department observe each other's lessons and the head of department monitors students' exercise books, providing valuable feedback. The department has improved very well since the last inspection, having developed a clear sense of purpose and improved examination results and progress in all year groups.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Arrangements for the most able students in Years 10 and 11 meet their needs effectively.
- Students' performance in GCSE examinations relative to other subjects has fallen, although achievement is satisfactory and current attainment looks to have improved.
- Students' good attitudes contribute to their progress.
- A lack of varied tasks in Years 7 to 9 limits challenge for all students.
- Planning is insufficiently long term for sustained improvement in student achievement and, hence leadership is unsatisfactory as is improvement since the last inspection.

## Commentary

63. Results in Year 9 tests in 2004 were a little above the national average and continued an upward trend in line with the national picture. The current standards in Years 7 to 9 are in line with national averages and reflect the performance in the most recent tests. Books contain good quantities of well-presented work, although many of the exercises consist of repetitive, standard examples. At GCSE, results increased well between 2003 and 2004 and were in line with the national average. Although they have yet to return to the level of 2001 they are above results at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of students attaining the highest grades, particularly boys, was smaller than expected. The performance of boys has fallen relative to that of the girls as has students' performance relative to that in their other subjects. Performance in mathematics at GCSE has been falling behind that in other subjects. Despite this the achievement across the school is satisfactory for students whose attainment on entry is a little below the national average. Current standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average and are better than recent GCSE performances, particularly in the top sets.
64. Teaching and learning across the school are satisfactory with some very good practice seen. Teachers question well and probe the students' understanding. Students enjoy their mathematics, partly because relationships are good. Where teachers plan well they make good use of time and provide a variety of activities to challenge those students capable of high attainment. The students rise to this challenge. However, teachers in Years 7 to 9 do not adapt methods and materials sufficiently to meet the needs of all students. This is largely because this is not carefully planned for in the scheme of work. Consequently, there is insufficient challenge in these year groups and potentially high attaining students do not achieve all that they might. By contrast, students with special educational needs are very well supported in designated sets, are taught well and make very good progress. Tasks set in Years 10 and 11 encourage students' thinking more effectively. These students are particularly well challenged by the expert teaching in the top sets.
65. Good work is being done to ease the transfer from primary school but co-operation on curriculum issues does not take place. In the less successful lessons, undue time is spent revisiting previous work, including that covered in primary school. Suitable use is made of new technology to enhance teaching and aid learning. Marking is good with helpful comments to aid progress, but there are inconsistencies across the teaching team. Assessment is used satisfactorily to support student learning, although the benefits of a thorough analysis of data for identified groups are not being realised.

66. Management is satisfactory. Monitoring systems are in place to improve both teaching and learning. Recent staffing difficulties are well managed. Development planning is insufficiently focused for long-term improvement of student achievement. While individual members of staff are committed to doing their best for the students, leadership of the subject is unsatisfactory since the common determination to drive up standards provided by strong leadership is absent. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

67. Mathematical skills are average and are sufficient to allow access to all areas of the curriculum. In the recent past in-service training has introduced members of staff to current methods of teaching basic skills. Within the mathematics teaching basic skills are developed well through the use of appropriate lesson starter activities. Provision for the development of mathematical skills across the curriculum is satisfactory. In subjects there are opportunities to practice skills and members of staff ensure that students are able to deal with mathematical problems in their lessons. Well-prepared numeracy booklets provide useful practice in tutorial sessions. Development is at a very early stage as a whole-school issue, focusing on using opportunities across the curriculum to develop mathematical skills in order to benefit progress.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is always satisfactory or better, so that students' learning is secure and they make appropriate progress, although a small number of older students do not concentrate sufficiently in some lessons.
- The diversified curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is enabling many students to achieve well.
- There is scope to use new technology to enhance teaching and learning more effectively.
- Very effective leadership and management are resulting in rapid improvement.

### **Commentary**

68. There was good improvement in Year 9 test results in 2004. They were in line with the national average and results in schools with similar attainment on entry to Year 7. Results were comparable to those in mathematics, but below those in English. The progress made by boys and girls was similar and satisfactory. Much recent work has been carried out to improve the work planned for Years 7 to 9, with an initial major focus on Year 9. The rigour with which the students' knowledge and understanding are assessed has also been improved. This has enabled teachers to target intervention work with greater accuracy, thereby making learning even more secure. The school's own data shows continuing improvement in the students' knowledge and understanding and this is borne out in lessons. Achievement is satisfactory overall, with many students' achieving well. Standards are average by Year 9. Higher-attaining students are being provided with a good level of challenge in their lessons.

69. A range of opportunities are provided for students in Years 10 and 11. The school's vocational route includes science as a single GCSE. Students following this course performed comparatively well in 2004 and current students are also achieving well in lessons. This is because they are taught well and have developed effective working practices with their teachers. The results of students taking all three sciences were comparable with the average of their other subjects in 2004. This represents secure progress through the courses, with current students continuing to achieve at appropriate levels. Students taking the double GCSE did not do as well as in their other courses in 2004. Combining all of these results shows that performance in science was comparable with that in English and mathematics in the school and with science results nationally. Initial coursework marks and module test results are showing an improvement on last year. This improvement is also evident in lessons, where again students are achieving at appropriate levels and standards are broadly average overall.
70. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but good in more than half the lessons. Many of the elements encouraged by the national strategy are evident, but not yet having a consistent impact. Intended learning outcomes are clear and the activities planned enable them to be achieved. Key words are identified and emphasised. However, there are times when a greater focus on reviewing and consolidating ideas at key points, including the end of lessons, could secure learning even more strongly. The best lessons achieve this by using strategies that require all students to demonstrate what they know and understand and draw ideas together clearly and succinctly. Sometimes, this is managed in an enjoyable way. Effective questioning by the teacher enables a quick evaluation of which students need additional targeted support, as well as those who could benefit from an extra challenge. There is some good use of new technology, but the role of information and communication technology in supporting and developing learning is underdeveloped.
71. The students' work is routinely marked, usually with some feedback and supportive comments. This provides them with clear guidance and targets for improvement, although marking does not always have a significant impact on the students' future work. Technicians manage resources well and support teachers in ensuring that activities work effectively. Students with special educational needs are supported well in lessons, including through the targeted work of additional adults when they are present. This enables them to make secure progress along with their peers. Students mostly respond well to the high expectations that teachers have of them. However, there are occasions when some students, mainly older boys, do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning. They need reminders or encouragement from the teacher to focus and work independently at a good pace. They do not achieve all that they could in these instances, although they do not disturb the learning of others.
72. An accurate evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the department has been made, with areas for improvement targeted well. Positive action has resulted in considerable impact in a short space of time, as is evident from the improving standards of attainment. Consequently, improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The new and very effective leadership and management of the department are developing a more cohesive team which is delivering an increasingly consistent experience to students. Positive professional development is contributing to a growing confidence and expertise within the team, which has experienced considerable change over the past few years. Extensive analysis and evaluation of data is enabling support and intervention to be targeted much more effectively. This, together with the development of teaching schemes, is enabling teachers to plan their

lessons to take account of the needs and aspirations of students more accurately. There is a very clear agenda for continued improvement and very good capacity to achieve it.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Examination results have been below average in recent years, although standards are currently higher.
- Teaching and learning are now good in all years, staffing has improved and there are now more specialists in the department.
- Leadership and management are good and the information and communication technology curriculum has improved in all years.
- The use of projection facilities by students to demonstrate work and play a greater part in lessons should be adopted more widely in the department.

### **Commentary**

73. Results in computing at GCSE, taken by less than one-third of the year group in 2004 were significantly below the national average, although all candidates passed. The percentage attaining higher grades has fallen since the previous year when results were close to average but many more candidates are now able to take the examination course from across the whole ability range. Girls' results were better than those of boys.
74. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average and there is little difference between boys and girls. The course is based upon the national strategy and good liaison with primary schools helps the transition to the secondary curriculum. Achievement is good in lessons as most students make good progress and some make very good progress in developing and applying their skills. Students with special educational needs are well supported and achieve well. The need for some teachers to travel between sites, sometimes for just one lesson, can result in lost teaching time, despite efforts to ensure that this time is used appropriately.
75. In Years 10 and 11 standards seen were average overall. The overwhelming majority of students now take a full or short course at GCSE, including those with special educational needs who are well supported in their work. The range of attainment is relatively wide but achievement is good. There is no significant difference in the achievement of girls and boys currently in Years 10 and 11. A small number of students do not take an examination course and the department has developed a system to monitor their progress in using information and communication technology across a range of other subjects. This appears to be an effective strategy for the relatively small numbers involved. From September 2005, the curriculum will improve further when all students will have timetabled information and communication technology lessons.
76. Work in all years is supported by the better than average number of computers and the updating of older hardware and software. There have been some staffing difficulties in recent years but these are now almost all resolved through the

deployment of more, permanent specialists. Teaching and learning throughout Years 7 to 11 are good. Courses are well planned by the department and resources are good. In all courses there is a combination of well-chosen paper and computer-based resources as well as activities which enable students to achieve to the best of their abilities. Assessment and monitoring are good and help students to know what is needed for improvement, and to know how to achieve their full potential.

77. There have been significant improvements in the working and effectiveness of this curriculum area. Improvement in the provision of information and communication technology since the last inspection is good and this more stable department with more specialists has the capacity to improve further.

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

78. The use of information and communication technology in subjects is satisfactory overall with some well developed areas. From Year 7 students' competence in a range of appropriate software is developed well in information and communication technology lessons. This supports the use by subject departments of new technology to enhance teaching and learning using language, numbers, graphics, presentation software, aspects of control and monitoring as well as effective use of the Internet for research and access to specific learning resources.
79. There is very effective use of information and communication technology in physical education, music and by staff in the special educational needs department. Spreadsheets, word-processing, presentation software and spreadsheets are used well in business studies. The growing number of interactive whiteboards and data projectors are being used to good effect in several subjects and plans are well advanced to increase the use of this technology. However, there is more scope for direct use by students to demonstrate their ideas and work to the whole class. The use of information and communication technology is never less than satisfactory in all other subjects, although there is scope for developing the use of new technology further in science and art and design. All subjects are meeting requirements in respect of information and communication technology use; however, the auditing and mapping of the use of information and communication technology should be developed further to ensure that all students have similar, appropriate opportunities and experiences.

### **HUMANITIES**

80. **Sociology** was introduced as a GCSE subject in September 2005. One Year 10 lesson was sampled during the week of the inspection. Students in the lesson achieved very well and have made a very good start to the course. Teaching was very good and provided the students with many opportunities to discuss and share their ideas. Because of this, they were able to come up with a good set of reasons to explain some of the factors impacting on working class educational under-achievement.

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Leadership and management are good with very good aspects and the subject benefits considerably from its place within the humanities faculty.
- Teacher assessment in Years 7 to 9 is not always accurate.
- Good student attitudes promote a positive learning environment.

## Commentary

81. Students arrive in Year 7 with a limited range of geographical skills and standards on entry are below national expectations. They make good progress and achieve well because of enthusiastic teaching and standards are broadly average at the end of Year 9. Students of all abilities demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of both human and physical geography based upon detailed schemes of work and can apply this knowledge using a wide range of geographical skills. Students often use geographical terms with confidence during class discussion. When available, students with special educational needs are well supported in lessons by informed learning support assistants. Girls achieve a higher standard than boys because they have stronger literacy skills and take more care with their work. GCSE results in 2004 were just below the national average for students gaining A\*-C grades and just above average for students gaining A\*-G grades. These results represented a good improvement on the previous year. From the work seen achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good and the standard of the current Year 11 is above average. Girls attain higher standards than boys because they write extended answers to show their understanding, although boys respond well in lessons.
82. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons carefully using an effective three-part lesson structure. Good features in lessons are positive relationships, good quality explanations and the use of challenging questions that help students to think clearly and to reinforce their learning of the topics being studied. For example, in a very good Year 9 lesson students had to design a structure to withstand a simulated earthquake. This led to good engagement of boys, collaborative group-work, discussion and very good achievement for all students. The teacher in a Year 11 lesson used a range of artefacts to good effect to challenge their understanding of the tropical rainforest. However, some lessons particularly in Years 7 and 8 are teacher-dominated and over elaborate explanations do not engage students particularly lower ability boys; this leads to an increase in noise levels. From the work seen and lessons observed there is also some inconsistency in the setting of homework to support learning in Years 7 to 9. There is effective use of both local and residential fieldwork.
83. Detailed schemes of work, good planning and vision have created a focused teaching team. Assessment procedures are in place, although teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 is too generous. Students' work is marked and good guidance given on what they need to do to improve. Accommodation and learning resources are satisfactory. The department has its own small computer suite that is often used effectively. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and the subject is now well placed to improve still further.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well overall because teachers challenge and support them.
- Standards in the analysis of historical sources are above average.
- Middle-attaining boys did less well in history than in their other subjects in last year's GCSE examination and, although the department has begun to tackle this problem, it needs to make this a priority issue.
- Students enjoy their lessons and are prepared to put in considerable effort.
- This is a well-led department with a clear focus on what needs doing.

## Commentary

84. Results in GCSE examinations were significantly below average in 2003 and 2004 for the percentage of students achieving A\*-C grades. However, the proportion who gained A\*-G grades was just above the national average, as was the number who gained A\* or A grades. A significant number of middle-attaining boys did less well in history than they did in their other subjects, with many gaining D grades when they had been targeted for C grades or above. This means that the overall percentage of boys who achieved A\*-C grades was well below the national average.
85. By Year 9, standards are broadly average. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are also average. Achievement is good overall, particularly for higher-attaining students and lower-attaining students, including those with special educational needs. The evidence indicates that the department is aware of the problem of middle-attaining boys and is beginning to tackle the issue more systematically.
86. The quality of teaching is good overall with some very good features. One excellent lesson was seen during the inspection. A particular strength is the focus on helping students to develop and improve their skills in analysing sources of historical evidence. A similar focus now needs to be put on enabling them to make better use of their historical knowledge and understanding to support their answers. Teachers provide students with good opportunities to practise their writing skills and their standards in this area are improving. Teachers are very enthusiastic about their lessons and, as a result, students of all abilities learn well and show enthusiasm for the topics they study. Although higher-attaining students and lower-attaining students are challenged very effectively in their lessons, middle-attaining boys sometimes need more support and encouragement than they receive, particularly in discussions.
87. Leadership and management are good. The head of department has a clear vision for the department and has clear strategies to achieve his aims. Teachers work very well together, sharing both good practice and concerns. The day-to-day running of the department is very efficient with clear procedures and expectations. The faculty structure provides good support and has enabled good improvement since the last inspection.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school does not meet the statutory requirement of teaching religious education to all students.
- The faculty structure has given good support to religious education.
- The students are encouraged to evaluate and give their views on topics; however, marking of their work is inconsistent.

## Commentary

88. Religious education is not taught to all students in Years 10 and 11 and those students have had no or little religious education during their time at the school. This contravenes the statutory requirements for religious education and also means that in 2004 standards were not assessed or reported for Year 9. The current Year 9 students have standards that are broadly in line with those expected by the Agreed Syllabus for religious education. A particular strength is the students' ability to empathise in a variety of situations and to give balanced views on topics. Last year the majority of students in Year 11 took the short course GCSE in 2004 and results were above average. Currently there are small option groups of students following the short course in Years 10 and 11 and their standards are average showing high levels of discussion in a variety of topics.
89. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, being better in Years 10 and 11 where they are good. Achievement is consistent with the teaching being satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Girls, boys and those with special educational needs all achieve at a similar level. The good relationships between teachers and students encourage a secure environment for learning and make a positive contribution to the learning in lessons. In all years, the students are encouraged to apply their knowledge to everyday situations. In the better lessons, starter activities stimulate students' thinking and there is a lively range of methods to stimulate interest and encourage active learning. The subject makes good use of a voluntary worker attached to a local church to contribute to lessons and support the teachers. The teachers know the students well and give good individual support; however, the full range of planned ideas to cater for the individual needs of students seen in the schemes of work are not being used in lessons.
90. The marking of books is variable - in the best marking there is good use of constructive comments that enable students to understand their current level of work and what is needed to raise that level. However, frequently the comments are general and this means that students do not have a clear lesson-by-lesson guide as to how they can improve their work. Comments that are made are not always followed up. This inconsistency also applies to the marking of assessments. The majority of the teachers are not religious education specialists. The impact of this is that they tend to fill in answers to questions because they do not have the confidence to develop ideas; this limits learning.
91. Leadership that has allowed the situation where the subject does not meet the legal requirements is unsatisfactory but the management structure is good. There are clear schemes of work delivered within a faculty structure that is enabling the students in Years 7 to 9 to follow a satisfactory programme even without any specialist staff to support the non-specialist staff. There is a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within the department and a vision for the development and improvement of the subject. Improvement since the last inspection is different in the different years but overall unsatisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 teaching and standards have improved and

progress is better and so improvement is good. At the time of the last inspection the provision in Years 10 and 11 met the legal requirement and they do not now and so improvement is poor.

## TECHNOLOGY

92. Design and technology was inspected in depth and lessons also observed in **child development** where GCSE results were well above average in 2004. Girls enjoy the child development course. Those who take a virtual baby home gain valuable insight as they apply theory to practice. The course work folders produced by Year 10 students and the child studies conducted by Year 11 are evidence of very good achievement in all aspects of the course.

### Design and technology

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at GCSE in 2004 were well above average.
- Most students achieve well as a result of the high quality teaching they receive.
- The use of information and communication technology has a very positive effect on learning.
- In Years 7 and 8, achievement in drawing for design is unsatisfactory, although graphics skills improve rapidly in Year 9.

### Commentary

93. The overall standard of work on entry to the school is below average in the use of hand and machine tools and in drawing skills. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average overall. They are better in making things and in knowledge and understanding of materials, tools and processes than in designing for specific purposes. Standards of written work are generally above average with the application of numeracy average. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard is well above average. High quality practical and course work are evident in food, engineering and graphics. The standard of coursework is better than often seen with new technology very well used for data analysis, graphics, research and presentation.
94. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good overall. For example, Year 8 students achieved well as they worked hard in resistant materials to produce a charity box of their own design. By the start of Year 9 achievement in drawing is weaker than might be expected because of the lack of formal teaching in Years 7 and 8. However, standards improve rapidly as students are given instruction in hand drawing and the use of graphics software. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good overall in food, graphics, resistant materials and engineering. Boys especially enjoy making tools in engineering and designing logos using new technology in graphics. Most students readily admit that they prefer making things but understand why they need to communicate ideas on paper. Good information and communication technology skills and the faculty's focus on literacy development have ensured that most students' folders are very well presented and easy to read. Lower and middle attaining boys have poor listening skills which adversely affects achievement in theory lessons or when preparing for written examinations.

95. Teaching and learning are good overall and are more effective in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. An outstanding lesson was observed with a group of Year 10 boys on the alternative education programme. Here, opportunities were given, under safe conditions, for independent learning involving construction and forge work. Students in this all boy group were highly motivated and surprised themselves by what they achieved. Training in the National Key Stage 3 strategy has made a very good contribution to most teachers' practice. Assessment procedures are good with exciting electronic developments in the use of and access to pastoral and academic records by all teachers. The lack of a baseline assessment for technology and the need to moderate teacher assessments in Years 7 to 9 have been recognised by subject leaders. Some written comments on students' work are still evaluative without saying why the judgement has been made. Teaching assistants give very good support to students with special educational needs. Their achievement is similar to others in their classes. The technicians also make a valuable contribution to lessons. Gifted and talented students have been identified but extra challenges have not yet been fully developed.
96. Leadership and management of the faculty are very good. This is a very effective team with complimentary skills and experience. The faculty evaluation shows very clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. Due to an effective team approach, ongoing staffing problems have had minimal effect on students' achievement. Computer-aided design and manufacture is an acknowledged area for further development. Minor health and safety issues have been shared with the school. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, although improving the provision for gifted and talented students remains to be dealt with successfully.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

97. There are many strong features to provision in **dance**. Teaching and learning are very good. Numbers on courses are increasing and standards are rising to above the national average. All students in Years 7 to 9 now undertake lessons in dance. Very good leadership and management and high quality dance accommodation contribute to the students' very good achievement.
98. **Drama** is taught within the faculty of performing arts and takes place in well equipped studio spaces on both sites. Students have one lesson a week in Years 7 and 8 and may choose it as an option in Year 9. It is a popular and successful subject at GCSE. The drama curriculum is well planned and stimulating. A strong and enthusiastic team teach lively lessons which are carefully constructed to involve all students in both activity and reflection. Productive relationships between students are very skilfully fostered and students are encouraged to evaluate their own work and that of others. Students enjoy their drama lessons and work hard. Teachers expect commitment and concentration and the self-discipline of students in a Year 7 lesson during the inspection was impressive. In GCSE classes students make very good progress because they are expected to work at a demanding pace and have been trained to use self-review, both individually and within their working groups, to shape and modify their performances. Their written work reflects the commitment students bring to the subject and they make very good use of multi-media presentation of ideas. There are many opportunities for involvement in extra-curricular drama and these are enthusiastically attended. The acting head of department provides good support for a hard working and successful team and the department offers high quality experience

for trainee teachers. The impact of work done in drama can be seen in students' work in other areas. Drama is making a significant contribution to developing students' confidence and increasing participation in talk-based activities in other lessons.

## **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students learn well because teachers have good specialist knowledge.
- Opportunities for enrichment are good and make a strong contribution to students' personal development.
- Computers are used but not enough to develop ideas creatively.
- Effective strategies support the development of critical writing.
- Assessment is not used well enough in Years 7 to 9 to inform planning in detail.

### **Commentary**

99. According to teacher assessments in 2004, students in Year 9 were working in line with national expectations. This was supported by work seen during the inspection. The percentage of students gaining an A\*-C grade at GCSE in 2004 was above average, with more than three times the percentage of A grades than nationally. Students do better in art than in other subjects they take. This is a big improvement since the time of the last inspection.
100. According to work seen during the inspection, students in Year 9 are working broadly in line with expectation. Students in Year 11 are working at a standard that is above average. This represents good achievement for all students, including those with special educational needs, and is a result of teaching that is good overall, with the teaching seen ranging from satisfactory to very good. Students in Years 7 to 9 gradually gain in skills and knowledge and understanding. They make good progress in the development of their critical writing skills because they are supported well by effective strategies. Students in Years 10 and 11 use a wide variety of media in their research and development of ideas. Teachers encourage creative individuality and work is very well presented in work journals. Work with computers is relatively less well developed, although there are opportunities in Years 9 to 11 to use digital cameras and to use specialist software.
101. Standards of work have risen in the last four years as a result of good leadership and management that ensures that teachers work successfully together as a cohesive team. Thorough monitoring and evaluation results in teachers being deployed effectively and less experienced teachers being successfully supported. All teachers have good subject knowledge and use visual material and practical demonstrations well to ensure that all students understand lesson aims. Assessment is used well in Year 10 and 11 and examination criteria make clear students' areas of strength and areas to improve. This is not used as well in Years 7 to 9 leading to planning being less detailed, resulting in a lack of pace and challenge.
102. There are several opportunities for students to catch-up on work, or in the case of higher-attaining students, to extend their skills at clubs after school. Visits to galleries and museums widen students' appreciation of art, as does the collaborative work

under the expressive arts umbrella. The work of the art department makes an outstanding contribution to the school environment through prolific displays of uplifting, high quality work that inspires the whole school community. As a result of clear vision for the development of the work of the art department, standards having risen at GCSE and there now being no unsatisfactory teaching, there has been good improvement since the last inspection.

## Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and management make a vital contribution to the department's positive and supportive ethos.
- All teachers strive to enable students to improve standards.
- Students' awareness of assessment criteria in advance of module assessments enables them to improve their results.
- The growing number of extra-curricular activities provides worthwhile enrichment for all students, particularly the musically more able.
- The high standard of concerts and productions provide participants and audiences with worthwhile musical experiences.
- The accommodation does not adequately reflect the school's performing arts status.

### Commentary

103. Since the last inspection improvement has been very good and the school had been awarded performing arts status. The 2004 teacher assessments show that by the end of Year 9, standards were above average. The proportion of students attaining A\*-C grades in the GCSE examination was in line with the national average. The number of candidates entered in 2004 was the largest entered by the department. As attainment on entry in Year 7 is below average, these results represent very good and good achievement respectively. Inspection evidence shows that standards in Year 9 are above expectations, representing very good achievement. However, there are not enough opportunities to work with new technology in the lower site although the new dedicated music computer suite will be operational after Easter. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are also above expectations, representing very good achievement.
104. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 to 11. Some very good teaching was also seen in Years 7 to 9. Students' learning is good because tasks are clearly explained and illustrated with musical demonstrations. Allocation of time is generous, allowing the students to get the best out of the interesting variety of practical activities available in each lesson. This is particularly the case with special educational needs students who find the practical nature of the tasks well suited to their attainment levels. The more able students are given opportunities to develop their performing skills further by well chosen, interesting and challenging tasks. Students also benefit from the regular questioning about previous learning which helps them develop their skills and knowledge on a good foundation. Good relationships were observed in all classes, which enable students to work in a supportive environment. Lessons are well planned with carefully chosen musical resources. The department offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities which give further support to the more musically able students. These include an increasing

number of instrumental lessons in which 16 per cent of the school participate, numerous concerts and an annual production, all of a very high standard. The school has recently promoted a performance of *West Side Story* and a tour of Germany is taking place this summer.

105. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. The new head of department has continued and extended the innovative work of her predecessor and is inspiring an enthusiastic team of teachers to engage students in worthwhile musical experiences. Strategies to enable students to take responsibility for their learning and further innovations in assessment are helping to raise academic standards. However, growth in the number of students regularly involved in an increasing number of musical activities has caused the department to outgrow the present accommodation. Resources are good, and will improve at the lower school site now that the new music computer suite is ready to be used.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

### **Physical education**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are good; teachers plan lessons using a range of activities that allow all groups of students to learn well.
- The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success.
- The sports hall is out-dated; the hard courts are in urgent need of resurfacing.
- There are some inconsistencies in the use of assessment data to determine standards at the end of Year 9.
- The good extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for all students to extend their learning.

### **Commentary**

106. Standards in lessons and in work of Year 9 students are average. Standards at the end of Year 11 have risen since the last inspection and are above average. The standards of boys and girls are similar. Students are achieving well across all years, given their below average attainment on entry to the school. GCSE results have been rising at roughly the same rate as nationally. They were in line with the national average in 2004. The rising trend in results is in line with the national expectation. Students with special educational needs and the talented, achieve well. High attaining students are successful in a range of sports at area, county and sometimes at national levels.
107. The overall quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. It is good in all years and in a significant minority of lessons is very good. Lessons are challenging and work is planned to suit all groups of students. Lower-attaining students make good progress, because teachers modify tasks, simplify language and use demonstrations effectively. Two students with severe learning difficulties played a full part in a Year 11 football lesson because of very good planning by the teacher and the encouragement and expertise of two learning assistants. The learning of higher-attaining students, including the talented, is accelerated by extension tasks and

grouping. Facilities are adequate overall, but the sports hall is now outdated. The hard courts are in urgent need of resurfacing and GCSE theory lessons lack the stimulating environment of a subject-specific teaching base. The good extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for all students to extend their learning. The subject contributes well to the improvement of students' literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers often use new technology very well in lessons, but GCSE students make limited use of their information and communication technology skills to research and present work. Students' learning is enhanced by their very positive attitudes.

108. Leadership is very good and management good. This is another area of improvement since the last inspection. The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success and is ably supported by a dedicated team of specialists. Good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and students' standards. Assessment systems are good overall, but there are some inconsistencies in the use of data to determine standards at the end of Year 9. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' personal development. The school is very determined to replace the outdated indoor facilities with a new multi-purpose sports hall. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

109. Two **business studies** lessons were sampled in Year 11. There is a wide range of ability evident in Year 11, although standards seen in lessons were satisfactory overall. Teaching is good; lessons are well planned and have good pace. Learning resources provide appropriate challenge for the whole range of ability helping to ensure that achievement is good. Classroom management is good, ensuring that all students make at least appropriate and more often good progress.
110. A lesson of **health and social care** was observed in Year 11. This was very well taught by a teacher who knew the subject material well. The lesson was very well planned and ensured that appropriate work was provided to challenge the students while support was available to guide those finding the topic difficult. Standards were broadly average for the course, although the students were achieving very well as they analysed barriers to communication and how they might be overcome.

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

111. **Personal, social and health education** was sampled during the inspection. Teaching was satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 to 11, with similar strengths and weaknesses to those reported for citizenship in the paragraph below. The school meets statutory requirements for sex and relationships education, careers education and guidance, and for drugs education. The school has been successful in remedying the weaknesses listed in the previous inspection and improvement has been good.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' work benefits from links with the local community and extra-curricular activities within the school.
- The subject is well led.
- A particularly large proportion of students reached the very highest levels of the GCSE in 2004 and standards overall are in line with national expectations.
- There is insufficient monitoring of lessons in Years 7 to 9.

### **Commentary**

112. The citizenship course has developed since the previous inspection and dovetails neatly with long-established community links, which are its greatest strength. Not only do these benefit students directly, leading in some cases to the highest examination grades, but also they are of value to the town. Civic leaders report that young people are better integrated into the local community than they used to be, that projects have enhanced the environment and that young people treat the fabric of the town well because they have played a part in developing it.
113. These benefits are the result of good leadership in this area of the curriculum over a considerable period of time. The school has created a team of teachers with a clear vision for the course, who work together well. Teaching and learning are good in

Years 10 and 11, where all students take the short GCSE course in citizenship, taught by specialist staff. Standards observed during the inspection were in line with national expectations and students report that they benefit from the course. National comparisons for the short course are not available, but the proportion of students who gained grades A\*-C in 2004 was higher than school targets and a much higher than expected proportion gained grades A\* and A. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 because teaching focuses on examination requirements and many students devise coursework tasks relating to the school's local connections. The school council plays a role in teaching all students about democratic institutions and is well respected by students. Teachers mark students' work carefully and helpfully, but in some lessons, students are too easily satisfied with contributions of low quality and teachers do not always challenge them adequately.

114. All students in Years 7 to 9 follow a course in personal development, which includes citizenship. Form tutors teach the course in Years 7 and 8, while specialists teach it in Year 9. Results assessed by teachers show that the majority of students work at the levels expected nationally by the end of Year 9. Achievement is satisfactory, with teachers in most classes providing students with an appropriate level of challenge and covering all strands of the citizenship course. Girls' achievement is better than boys', but teachers are working to redress this by grouping students carefully. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and standards observed in lessons are in line with national expectations. Students with low prior attainment benefit because they are taught in small groups, where lessons are well taught, students well managed and activities are relevant. Some of the form tutors do a good job of teaching in the first two years, but this is not consistent. A few neither prepare sufficiently to teach elements of the course nor respond adequately to students' written work, so a minority of teaching in Years 7 and 8 is unsatisfactory. Assessment procedures are satisfactory because teachers in Year 9 are able to show whether students are reaching nationally expected levels or not, but they do not provide sufficient information for the department to analyse weaknesses in provision for the younger students.
115. The head of department is aware of the areas that need to be developed and provides good leadership. Management is satisfactory. This has produced good improvement since the last inspection. However, the monitoring of teaching, especially where the course is taught by several different non-specialist members of staff, is not sharp enough.

## 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	22	72.7	78.3	9.1	21.6	23.6	28.5
Biology	12	50.0	63.5	16.7	10.4	18.3	19.8
Business studies	20	75.0	75.3	25.0	15.4	29.0	25.7
Chemistry	7	71.4	70.3	14.3	13.2	25.7	23.0
Drama	9	77.8	86.6	22.2	19.8	32.2	30.9
English literature	22	100	86.2	22.7	17.4	39.1	29.7
French	7	85.7	79.8	14.3	19.4	34.3	28.2
Design and technology	10	80.0	72.6	0	13.9	25.0	24.3
General studies	12	25.0	73.6	0	16.9	5.8	25.5
Geography	15	80.0	75.5	13.3	20.4	28.0	27.0
History	10	90.0	82.2	30.0	20.8	37.0	29.2
Information technology	12	75.0	66.6	0	8.8	19.2	20.6
Mathematics	15	73.3	59.9	13.3	14.1	26.0	20.5
Media studies	20	100	87.2	20.0	24.9	38.0	32.8
Music	21	90.5	79.8	4.8	16.9	30.5	27.5
Other social studies	49	87.8	67.8	42.9	15.1	36.9	23.2
Physics	9	33.3	66.4	11.1	14.8	11.1	22.4
Sociology	22	81.8	72.1	36.4	19.6	35.9	25.9
Spanish	4	50.0	77.1	0	17.0	15.0	26.5
Sports/PE studies	9	100	72.2	44.4	11.8	40.0	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	8	100.0	98.3	0.0	50.2	75.0	87.1
Biology	10	100.0	96.6	20.0	40.0	70.0	79.3
Business studies	19	100.0	98.9	15.8	39.4	67.4	81.8
Business (VCE)	12	91.7	91.6	0	24.1	56.7	67.9
Chemistry	4	100.0	97.7	25.0	50.0	80.0	85.7
Drama	16	100.0	99.6	37.5	42.8	85.0	85.1
English literature	19	100.0	99.4	36.8	44.9	86.3	85.5
French	5	100.0	99.0	20.0	53.1	72.0	88.9
Design and technology	1	100.0	97.8	0.0	35.0	60.0	77.9
Geography	12	100.0	98.8	8.3	46.4	70.0	85.2

History	5	100.0	99.0	20.0	45.6	84.0	85.1
Information technology	9	100.0	96.3	11.1	25.7	62.2	71.1
Leisure and recreation (VCE)	14	100	90.7	0	18.3	64.3	64.6
Mathematics	9	100.0	96.8	44.4	56.6	84.4	89.5
Media studies	5	100.0	99.2	20.0	40.4	76.0	83.5
Music	6	100.0	98.2	50.0	37.1	83.3	79.5
Other social studies	35	100.0	97.4	40.0	42.5	83.4	81.6
Performing arts (VCE)	5	80.0	94.7	60.0	48.8	76.0	85.5
Physics	5	100.0	96.7	0.0	45.3	60.0	82.6
Sociology	4	100.0	98.5	25.0	45.3	75.0	84.6
Spanish	2	100.0	98.2	50.0	53.2	90.0	88.7
Sports / PE studies	7	100.0	97.8	42.9	30.9	85.7	75.4

### ***Level 2 vocational qualifications***

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Health and social care	8	87.5	n/a	12.5	n/a	0	n/a
Information technology	6	33.3	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
Leisure and tourism	9	77.8	n/a	11.1	n/a	0	n/a

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

116. English was inspected in depth and French was sampled. The number of students choosing to continue with **French** in the sixth form has increased recently. They are well taught and are making good progress. Standards vary, but they all achieve well because they focus on their work and try hard. Teachers speak French throughout the lessons, providing a good variety of activities and an appropriate level of challenge.

### **English**

Provision in English is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Lively and challenging teaching creates enthusiasm and confidence in students with a wide range of abilities.
- Students make very good progress because lesson and homework tasks require them to trust their own judgement and they are encouraged to become independent learners.
- Support, guidance and resources are all high in quality.

### **Commentary**

117. Results at A Level have fluctuated in the last three years. In the 2004 A Level English literature examination, students' average grade score was slightly higher than those in other schools but the percentage gaining A and B grades was lower than the national figure. These results represent good progress for a group of students that had not attained highly at GCSE and compare favourably with their performance in other subjects at the school. Gender comparisons are difficult for this year group because only two male students sat the examination.
118. In lessons and in their writing during the inspection, students were achieving very well and their work was of an above average standard. At the start of Year 12, a well-designed introductory course helps them make a rapid transition from GCSE. The impact of this can be seen in detailed and well organised work in Year 12 folders. The quality of coursework at the school has been commended by the examination board's external moderator. Relatively early in the course most students express themselves well and are starting to acquire a convincing academic style. In discussing texts they show that they have learnt how to combine personal insights with critical opinions. They are able to draw on knowledge gained from background material to speculate, interpret and compare. Their teachers have made them aware of the precise assessment objectives of the various sections of the syllabus and they start to address these in written work early in the course. Year 13 are very independent workers and have well developed critical vocabularies. An atmosphere of critical enquiry is established in lessons and students ask as well as answer questions. Written work shows that many are set to gain A and B grades in the summer examination. Boys are well represented in A Level groups and are achieving very well.
119. Teaching and learning are very good because the teachers are a strong team who know their subject well and teach it with energy and enthusiasm. This creates a positive ethos for learning and students are very appreciative of the guidance and encouragement they receive, both in and outside lessons. They are fortunate in the range of extra-curricular activities on offer and those who will study English at university have been well prepared. There is a very high standard of discussion in lessons. Teachers are extremely skilful in encouraging students to collaborate, hypothesise and defend their views. Small group talk is widely used as a preparation for wider discussion. This builds confidence in students across the ability range and ensures that everyone is active and involved in every lesson.
120. As in the main school, teachers are pro-active in selecting groupings for the maximum benefit of the students. Careful pairing of teachers within the team means that subject expertise is economically shared and staff new to A Level are well supported and quickly able to teach confidently. Good teamwork also lies behind the production of very high quality resources. The materials on 'the gothic' which students were using during the inspection had very successfully enabled them to understand literature in its wider context. Teachers also encourage students to carry out independent research and to appreciate that it is important to read widely beyond set books and materials provided for the course. Individual reading is well developed and students benefit from the regular sessions for sharing responses to books. The head of department's excellent leadership and management and the hard work and enthusiasm of the A Level team offer students a rich experience of advanced level study and have led to very good improvement since the last inspection.

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

121. Support for the development of language and literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory. The students' overall language skills are broadly average, although their discussion skills are well developed. Most talk confidently and freely and listen thoughtfully to one another. In English they make particularly good use of opportunities for group work. Students generally have good information retrieval skills and are supported by a well stocked library and separate study facilities. Most express themselves fluently in writing, although some geography students do not always do justice to their ideas in written work.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The good teaching encourages the students' understanding and helps to support very good relationships that aid learning.
- Student's very good attitudes ensure that they make better than predicted progress.
- Limited use is made of information and communication technology to aid teaching and learning.

### **Commentary**

122. Recent examination performances show that the majority of students attain higher grades than predicted on entry to the sixth form. This represents good achievement. Results in 2004 were average, although this was a fall from the well above average results of 2003. Females are performing better than males. However, numbers are small and when compared with prior performance, the difference is not great. Students have very good attitudes to their studies. Their work is well organised, particularly by the females, and is of an above average standard overall. A very good number of examples at the appropriate level testify to the effort being made.
123. Teachers have that confidence which good subject knowledge brings. Lessons are well planned to provide both pace and challenge for these able students. Time is well managed. Good use of individual study work aids students' progress. In the better lessons the interaction between teacher and students was encouraged by good questioning on both sides and developed understanding well. Very good student attitudes enable them to take a full part in the activities. As a result teaching and learning are both good. However, there is more scope to use new technology as an aid to the support of teaching and learning.
124. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a shared commitment to raise achievement and standards further. Plans are in hand to build on the improved GCSE performance being brought about by the arrangements for the most able in Years 10 and 11. Recent staffing difficulties have been managed effectively. With the positive elements of the previous inspection having been maintained, the improvement since then has been satisfactory.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

125. Competence in mathematics across the sixth form is average. There is no problem over access to the curriculum since subjects heavily dependent on mathematical skills, such as physics do not attract students who lack the appropriate skills. Provision for the development of mathematical skills is satisfactory. Where weaknesses do arise the members of staff in those areas take the necessary steps to overcome them.

## **SCIENCE**

126. Biology was inspected in depth and one lesson was seen in each of chemistry and physics. A Level results in **physics** were well below average in 2004, although AS

Level results were average. The physics lesson was taught well and enabled the single student to make good progress in applying ideas on radioactive decay and capacitor discharge to the behaviour of water being released from the bottom of a vertical column. There was a good balance of support and challenge and the student welcomed the opportunity provided for personal tuition, being determined to achieve the highest possible grade.

127. There were too few entries for **chemistry** A Level in 2004 to make valid comparisons with national results. In the chemistry lesson the teacher had determined that students were having some difficulty in securing their understanding of energetics. This was an opportunity to use past paper questions to explore ideas from a variety of perspectives. Good use was made of the actual mark scheme to ensure that students were familiar with the parameters of acceptable answers. Students did make secure progress and achieved appropriately, often as a result of the tenacity and energy of the teacher ensuring that their understanding developed.

## **Biology**

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There has been rapid recent improvement, so that students' achievement is now satisfactory.
- Teaching and learning are good in a high proportion of lessons.
- Effective leadership is providing clear direction for continued development and sustained improvement.

## **Commentary**

128. Results in 2004 were broadly in line with those achieved nationally. The students' performance was just below that expected from their attainment at GCSE and their results in their other subjects. However, this difference was not significant, and results have shown sustained improvement over the last three years. Current students are performing at a similar level overall, with some consistently attaining at the highest level. Their current achievement is satisfactory and improving.
129. Students make good progress in individual lessons because they are taught well. Teachers provide effective feedback to students on their performance, with clear targets for development, based tightly on advanced level grade expectations. Questions from previous examinations are routinely used to provide the basis for current performance, with extensive discussion about the responses accepted by the official mark scheme. This is providing students with invaluable experience of the style and scope of questions and helping them to construct their responses in the most effective way to maximise their marks. Students appreciate the security that this provides. Coursework has also been approached with greater rigour, resulting in improvement in this aspect too. Technician support has been particularly effective in enabling students to carry out this aspect of their work successfully.
130. Teachers use some very interesting contexts when requiring students to apply their knowledge and understanding. This is requiring the students to review and consolidate their ideas on a broad and comprehensive basis. This not only

strengthens their understanding, but also helps them to appreciate the range and complexity of the subject; it encourages them to become biologists. Lessons are also planned on the basis of learning strategies which are likely to have most impact. For example, this includes working in small groups and presenting ideas and conclusions to peers.

131. The school has provided the new subject leader with good support and professional development. This helped to ensure that improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory and that there is good capacity to sustain recent developments and improve further. Leadership and management are good. Leadership of the subject is seeking to ensure that the good teaching and learning of individual lessons builds even more consistently to produce good progress and achievement over the whole course. This could be aided by further work when students transfer onto the course after Year 11, and ensuring that their general learning skills are fully developed as early as possible. Resources, including the use of new technology, are becoming more sharply focused on delivering the teaching scheme most effectively.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

132. This subject area was not inspected in depth, but lessons were observed and work scrutinised in information and communication technology advanced level course. **Information and communication technology** examination results at A Level were average in 2003; however, the proportion of A and B grades fell to below average in 2004 although all candidates attained at least a pass grade. A wide range of standards was in evidence in sixth form courses at both AS and A Level. Standards seen in lessons and students' portfolios were below average overall in Year 12 but about average in Year 13. Achievement is improving; it is at least satisfactory and often good particularly in Year 13. Coursework is given detailed attention by both teachers and students; this ensures a good understanding of requirements and good development of the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve to the best of their ability. Students of all abilities are supported effectively by teachers and some good peer support was seen. Students also value the peer evaluation which is a lively aspect of coursework sessions. Courses are well planned by the department and resources are good. Assessment and monitoring are good, ensuring that students know how to improve and how to achieve their full potential. There have recently been significant improvements in the organisation and effectiveness of this curriculum area with more stable specialist staff. Improvement in the provision of information and communication technology since the last inspection is good and the department now has the capacity to improve further.

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

133. The standard of use of information and communication technology by sixth form students is satisfactory overall. They have appropriate word-processing, spreadsheet and presentation skills. They use the Internet appropriately for research and for learning resources in all subjects. The students have had different experiences lower down the school because until recently information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 was an examination option for a minority of students. There are small A and AS Level information and communication technology groups but there is no timetabled course for general skill development. The information and communication technology department is willing to provide support for individuals where specific needs arise. The use of new technology to enhance teaching and

learning is very good in leisure and recreation, physical education and music. It is good in English, art and drama and satisfactory in all other subjects.

## HUMANITIES

134. Geography, psychology and sociology were inspected in detail. Lessons were also observed in history and law. There is currently no religious education teaching in the sixth form.
135. Students who sat A Level **history** in 2004 achieved well in the context of their prior attainment. One lesson was sampled during the week of the inspection. Students in the lesson achieved very well. Teaching was excellent. The lesson was very clearly linked to the requirements of the examining body and was very well organised so that students were clear about what is required of them and were able to work independently. Resources for A Level history are very good and students have access to an extremely wide range of the latest books.
136. All nine students passed **law** A Level in 2004 and over half achieved either an A or a B grade. The current Year 13 students are working at a higher overall standard than this and several are intending to study law at university. The Year 13 lesson observed was very well taught. The teacher used her high level of subject knowledge skilfully to draw out the students' knowledge of the law on murder and manslaughter as they solved a case study problem. The lesson challenged their thinking and extended their learning considerably. The group was highly motivated and responded with interest and enthusiasm to the material and the teacher's style. A Year 12 lesson was also taught well, as the students were being prepared for how they might tackle an AS Level type of question on statutory interpretation.
137. At the time of the last inspection no **religious education** was taught in the sixth form and so the school did not meet the legal requirements. Currently that is still the case although the school is now beginning to deal with this shortcoming through a series of visits and events. A conference has also been planned for later this academic year.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of the teaching and learning is always satisfactory or better although there is insufficient challenge for higher-attaining students.
- Positive student attitudes promote a good learning environment.
- Limited geographical skills restrict achievement for some students in Year 13.

## Commentary

138. Results at A Level in 2004 were below average with a greater number achieving C and D grades than the national average. The percentage achieving the highest grades was significantly below the national average. However, these results represented good progress for the students from their earlier GCSE performance. Standards for students currently in Year 12 are average and below average for Year 13. Students' achievement is satisfactory. Although they have a satisfactory knowledge of case study material, students have difficulty in its application as their

description of geographical information is far stronger than their ability to apply it. The geographical skills of male students in Year 13 are limited and restrict achievement, although they have reached the standard to achieve an A Level pass grade.

139. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Lessons are well planned and organised with an appropriate range of strategies and resources that promote learning. Relationships are constructive and students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Students are attentive and work effectively, both independently and collaboratively. However, the level of challenge for higher-attaining students is insufficient, particularly in the application of theory to practice. In Year 12 lessons students enjoyed presenting their work to others, although their work was descriptive rather than explanatory and lacked the use of appropriate geographical terms.
140. Leadership and management are good. Teamwork is a good feature in planning and teaching the AS and A Level courses. Teachers provide good role models for the students who appreciate and enjoy the subject. The residential fieldwork in Wales enhanced their understanding of different environments and developed a wider range of skills. Students' work is marked, although at times would benefit from a more focused critique. Good facilities promote a positive learning environment. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

## **Psychology**

Provision in psychology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers are very knowledgeable about the subject; their teaching is good and enables students to achieve well.
- Assessment is very good; students have a clear view of the level of their work and of what they need to do to improve.
- There are positive, respectful relationships between staff and students.
- New technology is used insufficiently to support learning and there are few opportunities for students to have visiting speakers, to attend conferences, or to link with students at other schools.
- There is a lack of challenge for the higher ability students in some lessons.

### **Commentary**

141. Achievement is good and standards are average in Years 12 and 13. A Level results in 2004 were below the national average, but this represented good achievement for most students in relation to their GCSE results. Female students achieve better than male students in examinations. The number of students taking psychology remains high; this year 69 students are taking examination courses.
142. AS Level psychology is a completely new subject for all students entering Year 12. They are well-prepared and understand the nature of the course well. They quickly grasp specific vocabulary and with practice begin to use it appropriately and confidently. They have plenty of opportunities to work on examination questions. Their work shows that their standard is average overall, although the spread of ability is broad. They are enthusiastic about the subject and show interest in it. In class, students listen carefully to their teachers, will contribute answers and sometimes they ask questions. However, overall they tend to be rather passive learners and in some

lessons this response affects their achievement. By Year 13, students have developed the skill of using subject specific-language and can express themselves orally using these terms appropriately. Relationships between teachers and students are good, with a high level of respect being shown.

143. Teaching and learning are good overall, although learning is reduced in some lessons due to the students' passive response. Teachers are experienced and very knowledgeable about the subject. Lessons are planned in detail and are very structured, which supports the learning of the less able students well. However, they do not generally include activities to challenge the more able students. 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. The work on ethics contributes very well to the students' moral development. Frequent assessment ensures that students have a realistic view of the level at which they are working. Marking is regular and accurate, and provides suggestions about how the students might improve their performance. The development of literacy and oracy are supported through the use of writing frames and opportunities to present to the class.
144. Leadership and management are good. The teachers are constantly seeking methods to adjust their teaching and so improve achievement and standards. The teachers work very closely together, are mutually supportive and link very well when teaching groups are shared. The department is efficiently organised and all staff are clear about their responsibilities. The subject was not taught at the time of the last inspection but is now well-established and popular. Areas for development such as increasing the use of new technology, creating more challenge for the more able, improving male students' results and developing opportunities to broaden the students' experience of psychology are recognised and solutions are being sought.

## Sociology

Provision in sociology is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of department has made a good start in the introduction of the subject into the curriculum in both the sixth form as well as in Years 10 and 11.
- Students achieve well because of specialist teaching that helps them to become independent learners.
- Although most students participate actively in discussions, there is scope to provide more opportunities for those lacking in confidence to develop their speaking skills.

### Commentary

145. Sociology is a new subject at the school. A very small number of students, who studied for both AS and A Level in one year, sat their examinations in 2004 and all gained a grade. It is not possible to make meaningful statistical comparisons for these results because only four students were involved; however, all achieved well in terms of their prior attainment.
146. Standards in Year 13 are broadly average. Students build well on what they learnt in Year 12 and are developing a clear understanding of an appropriate range of different theoretical traditions. They are beginning to apply a range of theoretical concepts to unfamiliar situations. Standards in Year 12 are also average. Students have made a good start to their course. Their achievement is good – they have not previously studied this subject – and they have already made clear and rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding. Students in Year 13 also achieve well in the context of their prior attainment.
147. Teaching and learning are good. Students are encouraged to become independent learners within a very supportive framework. Teaching is very enthusiastic and lively. Both teachers are specialists who have very good subject knowledge and understanding. Students react positively to this and show enthusiasm and positive attitudes towards the subject. Sociology is becoming a popular option for both male and female students and it recruits from a wide range of ability. Although most students are keen to engage in discussion, some lack confidence and there is scope to widen the range of strategies used to engage them in oral work.
148. Leadership and management are both good. Sociology was not offered at the time of the last inspection. The head of department has made a good start towards the introduction of sociology into the sixth form and, more recently, into Years 10 and 11. She shows a clear sense of purpose and direction. The specialist sociology classroom provides a very positive learning ethos, although other rooms are cramped and shared with other subjects.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

149. Two lessons of **design and technology** were observed, a sample of work studied and the students' views sought. Numbers taking the course in the past are too small for statistical comparison. Current standards are average. The lessons seen were well taught. Consequently, most students in Years 12 and 13 achieve good levels of knowledge and understanding, which they can then use when planning a product. A

largely male group of Year 12 students learned about quality control whilst a female-dominated Year 13 group gained deeper understanding of the use of textiles with special properties. Most students talk very positively about the course and understand the quality they are aiming for. They appreciate being taught by more than one teacher because they gain complimentary skills. Those Year 12 students who previously studied GCSE graphics are somewhat behind in their understanding of manufacture, whilst those who have studied engineering find the amount of drawing and writing difficult. In the Year 12 lesson no opportunities were given for discussing ideas with a partner before making an oral presentation; as a result male students communicated less clearly than the single female student. New technology is being used very well in both groups for presenting information to students, for personal research and the presentation of ideas.

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

150. Art and design and music were inspected in depth. Lessons were also observed in dance, digital photography, drama, and media studies.
151. The course in **digital photography** is newly established at A Level. It has a recently refurbished suite of computers, with the latest video editing equipment and specialist software and is popular at AS Level with a few students being the first to do a second year. Most students are achieving as expected, but some not as well as they should. This is because of assessment procedures not being used in enough detail to inform planning, so that every student has their needs met, especially where AS and A Level students are taught at the same time. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
152. **Drama** was not a focus subject in the inspection of the sixth form but A Level drama teaching was sampled. Students in Year 13 are responsive and draw from a good repertoire of techniques in practical work. They have a good working knowledge of dramatic genres and relevant literary terms. They work very effectively with one another and with their teacher to explore new texts. Students' written work is of a very good standard and both male and female students have been successful in A Level examinations in recent years, often doing better than students in other schools nationally and gaining a high percentage of A and B grades.
153. A Year 13 lesson of **media studies** was observed. A Level results in 2004 were below average; this was a fall from 2003. The lesson was taught well, although several of the students were somewhat reluctant to participate as fully as they might. The teacher used her specialist knowledge well to develop ideas and understanding about the conventions of gossip magazines. There was a wide range of attainment within the group with some potential A grade students, but standards overall were below average.

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- All students receive a great deal of personal attention from teachers and are encouraged to develop individual responses to themes.

- Work journals of higher-attaining students record the development of ideas very effectively.
- Some students have difficulty managing their time well.

## Commentary

154. In recent years, until 2004, results at A Level had been above average, with almost all students getting grades A or B and achieving well. In 2004, A Level results were below average and AS results were well below average. According to work seen during the inspection, students studying both AS and A Level are at present working above average and achieving well, making it likely that results in 2004 showed an uncharacteristic dip.
155. Students achieve well as a result of teaching that is consistently good, and due to the strong teamwork of teachers who share A Level teaching. The highest attaining students produce some large, stunning paintings as a result of thoughtful reflections on the human condition. Themes such as this make a worthwhile contribution to students' personal development, encouraging meaningful and original responses. Higher-attaining students record the development of these ideas well in journals. These are annotated perceptively in depth, and reflect the personality of individual students. However, some students do not manage their time well. They do not annotate and evaluate their work as they go along, perceiving these as add-on activities rather than an integral part of the creative process.
156. Teachers know their students well and use assessment procedures very effectively to ensure that all students are clear about their strengths and weaknesses and that they all achieve well. They each receive a high level of personal attention that allows and encourages students to develop individually and to respond to deadlines successfully. Teachers use visual aids and trips to galleries both here and abroad to inform and inspire students' work successfully.
157. Provision for art in the sixth form is well led and managed. Accommodation is very good, consisting of a dedicated studio and a suite of computers with specialist software, in addition to the Internet. These are available to use both in and out of timetabled lessons. There are also many opportunities to display their work around the school, enhancing the environment considerably and raising their own self-esteem. Because standards have been maintained, group sizes have doubled and there is now an opportunity to study digital photography as a separate option at A Level, progress since the last inspection has been good.

## Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent care and support given by the teachers in an unceasing effort to further raise standards and enable the students to develop as mature young musicians.
- The complementary skills of the teaching staff enable consistently high standards of teaching to be delivered.
- The very high standard of extra-curricular activities gives students very good opportunities for extending their performing skills.

- Very good relationships between teachers and students help to promote very good learning.

## Commentary

158. Results at AS Level in music and in music technology in 2004 were in line with the national average. All students achieved A to E grades in both music and music technology A Level examinations in 2004. However, the small number of candidates entered for the examinations make comparison with national statistics invalid. The results represent good or very good achievement when compared with students' GCSE results.
159. The numbers of students taking music examinations in the sixth form is growing, and standards of work seen in written work and in lessons are rising. Students achieve very well and standards are well above average. This is due to the very good teaching and the effort the students contribute to their own learning. No A Level lessons were observed in Year 13 but students in Year 12 AS Level music were observed confidently following scores of *Fingal's Cave* and identifying techniques used in the string writing with a view to incorporating them in their own compositions. Year 13 music technology students received a short introduction to new software and in response to the teachers' inspirational encouragement, eagerly started to explore how the extra facilities would improve their existing compositions. Year 12 music technology students accurately identified the difference between the various styles of popular music found in the second half of the twentieth century, in a spirited discussion with the teacher.
160. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. One excellent lesson was observed. All lessons are underpinned by a determination on the part of teachers that students should be independent and experience as broad a range of music and knowledge as possible. Students receive continuous challenge from teachers' probing questions and are able to extend their learning from the teachers' excellent knowledge. The conducive learning environment and the excellent role models provided by the teachers create an encouraging atmosphere in which students can state their views and make very good progress. Further influence is to be found in the extra-curricular activities where very high standards abound and these standards are passed on to the junior groups which the sixth formers take.
161. The excellent leadership and management is another contributory factor in promoting high standards and producing very good improvement since the last inspection. The head of department is highly efficient and has built a team of like-minded teachers, dedicated to enabling students to achieve very high standards. Accommodation is satisfactory because some lessons have to be taken in a practice room with other classes being taught in the adjacent classroom. Resources are improving, and attention is paid to updating computers in order to keep pace with increasingly sophisticated software.

## HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

### Physical education

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and meets students' individual needs very well, hence they achieve very well.
- The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success.
- New technology is used very well to support teaching and learning.
- Teaching and learning in examination theory work lacks the advantage of a dedicated teaching base.

## Commentary

162. Standards in lessons and work seen by Year 12 and Year 13 students are above average and show very good improvement from their attainment on entry to the sixth form; most students are achieving very well. A Level results were well above the national average; this represents an improvement since the last inspection. Students attained better results in sports studies than in their other subjects. Results in the 2004 AS Level examination were above the national average. The performance of boys and girls is similar. As in the main school, high attaining students gain recognition in a range of sports at area, county and sometimes at national levels.
163. The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is very good. Students achieve very well across both years, due to very good specialist teaching. Teachers show excellent subject knowledge and are very aware of how students learn. They work hard to use methods and resources that meet the students' needs. In a Year 12 lesson, the use of sophisticated video analysis facilities greatly enhanced students' work in skills analysis. A few students find the change to sixth form study difficult and initially, do not take sufficient responsibility for their learning. Teachers give very good support by easing students into research and further reading. Most students can write at length on a variety of topics, such as comparative studies of sports organisations in different countries. The extended writing skills of a small minority are less well developed. Students listen well and confidently use technical language. Teachers make very good use of new technology and the department's technician, to enhance teaching and learning. Students are encouraged to develop their numerical skills through a variety of tasks, such as interpreting flow chart data and calculating target training zones. Most handle numerical data well. Teachers' expectations of students are high and they respond very positively; retention rates for courses are very good. Students' written work is marked regularly and teachers' very good diagnostic comments ensure that students know how to improve. However, A Level theory lessons lack the enhancement of a subject specific teaching base.
164. Leadership and management are very good; this is an improvement since the last inspection. The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success. Very good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and standards. The newly introduced Community Sports' Leaders Award extends opportunities for students to take responsibility. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

## Leisure and recreation

Provision in leisure and recreation is **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The majority of students invariably gain grades higher than their GCSE results predict.
- Very good teaching and expert assessment of and feedback on students' work ensure that achievement is very good.
- The very good leadership and management of the subject is characterised by high expectations and very thorough evaluation of departmental performance.
- The course has extensive, relevant links with outside organisations which provide important vocational input into students' learning.

## Commentary

165. Leisure and recreation is among the most successful of sixth form courses in terms of student achievement. Results have been consistently around the national average with all students gaining at least a pass grade and individual students occasionally gaining one of the top grades. All but one of the seven students entered in 2004 gained grades above those expected, based on their GCSE performance. This very good achievement is based on consistently good or very good teaching, a thorough understanding and application by teachers of the assessment requirements of the qualification and students' application and productivity. Students enter with below, sometimes well below attainment levels, but adapt quickly and positively to the portfolio and practical-based emphasis of the subject. Standards are in line with national averages. Current students have developed an understanding of the key requirements of planning a leisure activity, are aware of the important health and social factors in organisations and understand the major influences on sporting trends in the United Kingdom. However, teachers have to work very hard to ensure those reluctant to contribute are fully involved in lesson activities.
166. Teaching and learning are very good. The three specialist teachers provide consistently good or very good lessons which are very well planned and enthusiastically taught. In a very good set of Year 13 lessons on planning and delivering outdoor activities, students used their excellent computer skills to design and produce a number of imaginative and relevant marketing documents. They also worked productively and co-operatively in planning the related event and were able to relate this planning to their stated objectives of the session.
167. The specific assessment requirements are very well understood and applied rigorously and consistently to student work. Feedback is positive and students know what they need to do to improve. Students also appreciate the access to staff to assist with their studies and the access to dedicated computers and resources in the department and the library. Student progress across the units is monitored, aggregated and evaluated very effectively to ensure that they do not fall behind with their studies. The department organises relevant visits and guests speakers which complement lesson activities and provide the important, relevant vocational input into the subject. These have included working closely with a professional football club and utilising the nearby outdoor activity centres. Leadership and management of the subject, and the vocational studies faculty are very good. High expectations of students have been established in the department where very good teamwork and the sharing of good practice ensure that there is a consistent approach to teaching the subject. Subject performance is evaluated thoroughly and plans, although not fully detailed yet, are now in place for delivering the new courses in September 2005. Accommodation and resources for the subject, including a suite of dedicated computers, are very good. The subject was not inspected at this level at the last inspection.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

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

- The business studies curriculum is good and information and communication technology is used well to enhance learning.
- A Level examination results in 2004 were below average overall although AS Level results improved to be above average.
- Teaching in most lessons is good although students do not always take a sufficiently active part in their learning.
- The recent business experience of some new teachers in the department could be used more as a departmental resource.

#### **Commentary**

168. Examination results at A Level were below average in 2004 and there were no entries in the previous year. Results at AS Level were above average in 2004 and were an improvement on the previous year. In the advanced vocational course results were below average. There were no higher A and B grades, but results improved over the previous year. These results represented satisfactory progress for the students on each course.
169. Evidence from a scrutiny of this years' work indicates that achievement is improving in all courses and it is generally good overall. Students are receiving much positive encouragement and good guidance in relation to coursework and examination requirements. Standards at A Level have risen and are now average, reflecting the improvement made at AS Level last year. The current AS Level group is also producing work of an average standard overall, with a significant minority working at above average levels. In the advanced vocational group standards are above average, especially in the students' coursework portfolios.
170. Teaching and learning are good in all courses. Lesson time is used well and syllabus content is dealt with in good detail, because lessons are well planned and have good pace. This was particularly noticeable in an A Level lesson on critical path analysis where all students were challenged well. They worked hard in groups on increasingly difficult and complex scenarios, analysing all possibilities in detail and arriving at well considered and clearly justified conclusions. Information and communication technology is used well to provide learning resources and to enable business problems to be analysed appropriately. More opportunities for group work and student presentations would further enhance learning opportunities Teachers are well aware of the different abilities and aptitudes of students, all of whom are supported appropriately, especially where specific needs have been identified. Assessment is good; work is marked regularly and teachers' comments ensure that students know how to improve further. Although information and communication technology is used well to enhance teaching and learning, teachers have limited access to an interactive whiteboard to make their lessons more interesting. Teaching and learning are enhanced with appropriate extra-curricular activities and visits.

171. Leadership and management are good, which is helping to consolidate improvement. Staffing in the business department is now more stable and includes several new members with good recent and relevant business experience. However, the benefit of this valuable experience is not exploited to any great extent, by the department as a whole, to enhance teaching and learning. The performance of individual students and of the department as a whole is analysed and used to inform planning, so that lessons have been learnt from analysing recent examination performance. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The curriculum has developed and teaching is good and the department has the capacity to improve further.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

172. No students took the advanced vocational qualification in **health and social care** in 2004. However, there is now a Year 12 group of nine students with some taking the intermediate level and others the advanced level. A very good lesson was observed in Year 12. The very effective teaching was based on clear planning that challenged the students in the mixed group. The students' learning needs were met very well as the intermediate level group considered the social and emotional development of children while the advanced level group were considering how the care value base is applied by care practitioners. Although overall standards in this group were broadly average, the students' achievement was very good given their starting points.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

173. The school does not provide any general programmes to support the students' personal, social and health education. This limits the development of their understanding of aspects of their role as citizens in today's society. However, tutorial periods and input from careers staff provide valuable experiences for the students.

## 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		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>3</b>
Students' achievement	3	3
<b>Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>3</b>
Attendance	3	3
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	3
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
<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		2
Accommodation and resources	2	3
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
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).*