

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **BISHOP STOPFORD SCHOOL**

Kettering

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122095

Headteacher: Mrs M Holman

Lead inspector: W Keast

Dates of inspection: 29<sup>th</sup> November – 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2004

Inspection number: 268750

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:	Voluntary aided
Age range of students:	11 – 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1424
School address:	Headlands Kettering Northamptonshire
Postcode:	NN15 6BJ
Telephone number:	01536 503503
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Hatcher
Date of previous inspection:	26 <sup>th</sup> April 1999

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Bishop Stopford is a Voluntary Aided Church of England comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 18 years. With 1426 students on roll it is bigger than average and the sixth form, with 366 students, is much larger than average. Students join the school from a very large number of primary schools, covering a wide geographical area. They come from a wide range of backgrounds, but overall the social and economic circumstances of students are very advantaged. Students' attainment when they come to the school is well above average. Student mobility is low as a below average number join or leave part way through the year. There are very few cared for students or students who are travellers. There are very few students whose home language is not English and the proportion from ethnic minority backgrounds is low. A below-average proportion of students has identified special educational needs or has statements of their needs. These students have a range of needs, the most common being dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Nearly all the students continue into the sixth form where they are joined by about 25 students, every year, from other schools. The number of students who leave after one year in the sixth form is small and most of those continuing for the second year go on to university.

The school has specialist technology college status, recently re-awarded for the fourth time. In 2004, Artsmark and Investors in People awards were re-affirmed. In recognition of the standards reached by students, the school is a member of the Specialist Schools' Trust Value Added Club and their 70% Club. Additionally, the school has Sportsmark and Healthy Schools Awards. Currently, the school is the leading partner in a Leading Edge Partnership, part of a national programme, with three other nearby secondary schools.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1522	W Keast	Lead inspector	
9595	S Cash	Lay inspector	
32278	D Roberts	Team inspector	English, sixth form English
18072	J Stephens	Team inspector	Mathematics; sixth form mathematics
4922	M Driver	Team inspector	Science; sixth form biology
25778	A Hicks	Team inspector	Information and communication technology; sixth form information and communication technology
2501	R Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art and design; sixth form art and design
8076	T Bendall	Team inspector	Design and technology; sixth form design and technology
17808	S Orpin	Team inspector	Geography
33753	P Dean	Team inspector	History; sixth form geography
32208	D Aitken	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages; sixth form German
20476	M Freeman	Team inspector	History
23307	N McDonough	Team inspector	Physical education
30814	E Coley	Team inspector	Music
19352	K Campbell-Platt	Team inspector	Special educational needs
15075	B Stephens	Team inspector	English as an additional language; sixth form French
28199	P Lawler	Team inspector	Sixth psychology; sixth form theatre studies
24453	G Jackson	Team inspector	Sixth form chemistry
15163	E Deeson	Team inspector	Vocational course – engineering; sixth form economics
10060	D Gutmann	Team inspector	Citizenship

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Bishop Stopford School is a very effective school.** Students come to the school with well above average attainment and these standards are maintained while at the school. Whatever their needs or backgrounds, students achieve very well because they are taught very well and they work hard. The school is led and managed very well and has developed a very good ethos. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- Results are well above average and compare very favourably with those of similar schools
- Students achieve very well throughout the school
- Students' excellent attitudes, which contribute well to the ethos and to their achievement
- Very good teaching, curriculum, support and guidance provide a very good quality of education
- Excellent leadership of the headteacher which is driving the school forward
- Accurate self-evaluation which identifies aspects and issues to be improved and consistent and coherent planning to tackle these
- Some inconsistencies in practice and provision in a range of issues

**Improvement since the previous inspection in 1999 has been very good.** All the previous key issues have been successfully resolved and what were weaknesses, namely provision for students with special educational needs, coherent planning for development, gathering and using assessment data and teaching in English in Years 7 to 9, are now strengths. Additionally, previously good results have improved, teaching has improved, previous strengths have been maintained with the re-affirmation of related awards, and acceptance on national initiatives has been gained.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Overall, **students achieve very well.** They achieve well in Years 7 to 9. The attainment of students when they come to the school is well above average and they maintain this level. The results in the end of Year 9 national tests in 2004 were well above the national and similar schools' medians, continuing a rising trend. Results in English, mathematics and science were all at similar levels. Current standards in Year 9 are well above average overall, and in the three core subjects.

The proportion of students gaining five or more passes at GCSE grades A\* to C, in 2004, was well above the national median and in the top five per cent of similar schools. Over the last five years, results have been rising in line with the national trend. Current standards in Year 11 are well above average and are particularly high in art. Overall, male and female students achieved equally well at A-level in 2003. Results were particularly high in chemistry and geography. They were well below average for a small group in religious studies. Current standards in the subjects which were a focus of the inspection are well above average overall. Standards in biology, French and psychology are above average, and are average in theatre studies.

**Pupils' personal qualities, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, are very good.** Their excellent attitudes and attendance, and their very good behaviour contribute significantly to their achievement.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education is very good.**

**Teaching is very good throughout the school.** Teachers use their very good knowledge and understanding to plan teaching which prepares students very well for examination success. Students learn well from clear explanations and good questioning, rising to the challenge of high expectations, working hard and concentrating well. Very good relationships foster an effective learning environment. The curriculum meets their needs and aspirations well in Years 7 to 9, and very well in the rest of the school. The extra-curricular learning opportunities are excellent and enhance the curriculum greatly. Students are very well cared for, supported and guided throughout the school. Very good links with parents and other schools, and excellent links with the community, support students' achievement very well.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** The headteacher is an outstanding and inspirational leader. She leads a very effective team of senior and middle leaders whose ambitions and aspirations for the school are shared by teachers and associate staff alike. There is no sense of complacency. The excellent team-work has enabled the school to continue to build on its many strengths. Governance is very good. Governors have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and, through their role as critical friends, they both support and challenge the school in its drive for excellence. Financial management is very effectively helping the school to plan for and achieve its goals.

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

Parents express very high levels of satisfaction with the school. They are particularly pleased with the way the school helps their children to settle in. They feel that the school is well led and managed and that teachers expect their children to work hard. Some parents would welcome more individualised comments on end of year reports and the inspection team agrees. Students think it is a very good school. They know they are expected to work hard and say they are taught well and that the school is well run. They are confident that there is someone to talk to if they have any problems. They also appreciate the very wide range of activities and visits in which they can take part. They do not think they behave as well as their parents and the inspection team do.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The school has accurately identified where improvements can be made to the education it provides so as to raise standards even further. It has planned to tackle these issues and should ensure that this planning is implemented. The issues identified within the report are relatively minor and can be summarised as achieving even greater consistency across the school, through disseminating best practice widely, in such aspects as:

- assessment for learning;
- developing students' thinking skills;
- subject leadership;
- using information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance teaching;
- planned opportunities for students to use ICT in sixth form.

## THE SIXTH FORM

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a very effective sixth form** which meets the needs and aspirations of its students with a very good range of academic and vocational courses. It is very cost effective. Students achieve very well as a result of their own determination to succeed and very good teaching. Results are well above average. The sixth form is led and managed very effectively.

The main strengths and weaknesses are

- The quality of teaching and the positive approach by students are contributing to learning and the subsequent high level of achievement
- The sixth form provides a wide variety of courses to cater for all aspirations and links with other colleges to create an inclusive curriculum
- The development of student mentoring provides individual support and guidance and helps students to prepare for the next stage in their career
- Students' excellent attitudes and positive relationships help to create a purposeful ethos
- Accommodation for individual private study 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>Very good</b> in <b>English literature</b> where students achieve very well because of academic rigour in the teaching. <b>Good</b> in <b>French</b> and <b>German</b> where students have good reading and listening skills and teaching uses the target language.
Mathematics	<b>Very good</b> in <b>mathematics</b> . Teaching is well structured and, in some cases, innovative.
Science	<b>Good</b> in <b>chemistry</b> and <b>biology</b> . Good relationships, hard work and good teaching help students achieve well.
Information and communication technology	<b>Very good</b> in <b>AVCE information and communication technology</b> . Teachers support students in their independent learning very well.
Humanities	<b>Very good</b> in <b>geography</b> and <b>psychology</b> . Students achieve very well because very good teaching uses a range of activities to challenge and engage their interest.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	<b>Very good</b> in <b>design and technology</b> . Students work closely with a team of teachers, each of whom contributes different strengths.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Very good</b> in <b>art and design</b> where students are very well supported in developing as confident and independent learners. Satisfactory in <b>theatre studies</b> where too little is done to develop students' dramatic skills so that they can put theory into practice.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	There were no focus subjects in this area
Business	<b>Very good</b> in <b>economics</b> . Students' motivation and teachers' enthusiasm lead to very good achievement.
Health and social care	There were no focus subjects in this area
General education	There were no focus subjects in this area

*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**

The form tutors provide support on a daily basis and monitor attendance. Additionally in Year 12 there are excellent arrangements for all students to have a personal mentor who offers support regarding all aspects of school life. Each half-term the mentor and student meet to review progress of current level of performance against the student's predicted grade. Key senior staff receive a detailed account of students' progress and additional support and guidance are given for underperformance. The mentor role is central to the induction process in ensuring that students are suitably focused on their courses. The school seeks to develop independent study skills but because of limited private study accommodation, students are encouraged to plan independent work at home. The form tutors and mentors carefully monitor this process to ensure time is used wisely. The very good induction arrangements help students to understand the expectations of the sixth form.

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

**Leadership and management are very good.** Senior staff have a very good overview of the sixth form curriculum. They monitor students' achievements and coordinate their academic and pastoral achievements very well. Governance is very good. Governors have a good understanding of the standards and students' achievement. Departmental planning links well with whole-school planning and good professional development supports individual and whole-school needs well. Resources are very effectively managed.

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

Students have very positive views of the school and view the sixth form as a place where relationships are harmonious. They enjoy being in the sixth form and find it a challenging and rewarding experience. They feel they are treated like adults, that they are taught well and their work is helpfully assessed. They respond positively to the type and range of teaching styles, in particular, to interactive teaching and the freedom to undertake independent study. Teachers are readily accessible and will provide help and support if it is required and requested. They appreciate their teachers and respond to the responsibility placed upon them for their own learning. The sixth form forum gives students a very good way of influencing the work of the school and they appreciate the emphasis the school gives to including their views about teaching and learning. They are pleased with the mentor arrangements which came about as a result of the sixth form forum. These, they feel are effective. Students appreciate the range of opportunities they are given. They enjoy the chance to make a significant contribution to the life of the school. The reservations over advice on entering the sixth form and subsequent suitability of the chosen courses, expressed by some students in their questionnaire responses, did not find support in discussions with many students during the inspection.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Results in national examinations at the end of Years 9 and 11, in 2004, were well above the national results, as they have been for several years. Standards in Years 9 and 11 are well above average. Students are achieving well in Years 7 to 9, and very well in Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs make very good progress throughout the school.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are well above those of similar schools
- The high standards of attainment on entry are maintained throughout the school
- Students achieve, as well as they do, as a result of the quality of teaching they experience and their own hard work
- On occasion, the highest-attaining students do not make as much progress in lessons as they could because work does not challenge them sufficiently

#### Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	38.2 (37.4)	n/a (33.4)
Mathematics	40.8 (41.8)	n/a (35.4)
Science	38.3 (38.7)	n/a (33.6)

*There were 211 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

1. The attainment of students on entry to the school, based upon their Year 6 results, was well above the national median<sup>1</sup>. The results of the national tests, at the end of Year 9, in 2004 were well above the national median and well above the median for similar schools.<sup>2</sup> Results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science were each well above the respective national and similar schools' medians. The trend in the school's results is rising more rapidly than the rising national trend. On average, girls have performed slightly better than boys over recent years.
2. Standards in Year 9 are well above average. While this is the case in most of the subjects, standards in music, design and technology and physical education are above average. Overall, students are achieving well at this stage in the year. Students' attainment on entry, in subjects other than the core, is variable, depending upon their experiences in their primary schools. Students' achievement, in relation to this earlier attainment, is very good in English, art, geography, history and ICT.
3. The achievement of students with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. The range and quality of the specialist interventions to meet the wide range of needs are very good, especially those aimed at providing early and consistent support in Years 7 to 9 for improving literacy, numeracy and other key skills of identified students on the SEN register. Students with statements make very good progress resulting from well organised and monitored provision which focuses on their individual needs. Students identified by the school as academically talented or gifted (ATAG) achieve as well as their peers. The extent to which they are challenged, by additional activities and work in lessons, varies across the curriculum.

<sup>1</sup> The median of a sequence of numbers or scores is the middle one, for example the 50<sup>th</sup> of 99 scores

<sup>2</sup> Schools whose students had an average point score, at the end of Year 6 in 2001, of at least 29 but less than 30

### 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	88.5 (89)	53.4 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98.6 (98)	86.4 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99.5 (100)	95.8 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	362.4 (359)	282.3 (289)

*There were 218 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

4. The proportions of students gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A\* to C, 5 or more grades A\* to G and at least one GCSE grade, in 2004, were all well above the national medians. In comparison with similar schools<sup>3</sup>, the proportion of students gaining 5 or more grades A\* to C was very high, in the top five per cent, while other proportions were well above the corresponding medians. Results in the three core subjects were well above the median both nationally and of similar schools, with the mathematics results in the top five per cent of similar schools. The trend in these results is in line with the national trend. Analysis of individual students' results compared to their earlier attainment shows that their progress, the value added by the school, from Year 6 to Year 11 and from Year 9 to Year 11, are both well above the national and similar schools' medians.
5. Standards in Year 11 are well above average and students are achieving very well, overall. Standards in all subjects are well above average and in art they are very high. Students are achieving well in modern foreign languages and engineering, and very well in all other subjects.
6. Students with special educational needs continue to make very good progress in Years 10 and 11, helped by the alternative curriculum, taught in conjunction with the local further education college, for a selected group of students. ATAG students continue to achieve as well as their peers.

#### Sixth form

Results in the sixth form, in 2003, were well above average, as they were the previous year. Standards in the subjects that were the focus in the inspection are well above average and students are achieving very well.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall results are being maintained at a high level
- Standards in the majority of focus subjects are well above average but there is some variation
- Students achieve, as well as they do, due to the quality of teaching and their own very hard work

#### Commentary

7. National comparative figures are not available for GCE and other sixth form examinations for 2004. A new scoring system has been introduced to cover all accreditations that students of this age may gain with the result that the average point score appears larger than before. In 2003, students' results were well above the national median. Male students performed a little better than female students although both were well above their separate medians. In all but religious studies, students' results were at least in line with the median for the subject, and most were above. Results were particularly high in chemistry and geography. They were well below average for a small group of students in religious studies. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is above average but small groups in individual subjects means results are more variable, year on year, because they are very dependent on the individual students choosing the course. Overall results in 2004 were very similar to the previous year.

<sup>3</sup> Schools whose students gained average points scores, in Year 9 tests in 2002, of at least 36 but less than 39

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	93.2 (93.8)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	39.3 (42.7)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per student	326.0 (333.2)	258.2 (263.3)

*There were 176 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

8. The subjects, agreed with the school, which were the focus of the inspection in the sixth form represented a cross-section of those being taught and were not simply the strongest. Standards in these subjects were generally well above average. They were above average in biology, chemistry, French and psychology and average in theatre studies. Students' achievement is satisfactory in theatre studies. Students are achieving well in French, German, chemistry and biology, and are achieving very well in the other subjects. As in the main school, this is as a result of the teaching they experience together with their own positive attitudes to learning and the commitment they make to their work.

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

Students' attitudes are excellent and their behaviour is very good. Attendance is excellent and punctuality good. The school provides very well for students' personal development.

**Main strengths**

- Students enjoy lessons and appreciate and participate fully in all the activities offered
- The quality of relationships creates an environment which is non-threatening, supportive and in which it is 'cool to learn'
- The school is seen as a safe environment by younger students and there are very few exclusions
- Students quickly become very mature young people; there are particular strengths in the provision for their moral and social development

**Commentary**

9. Students say that they thoroughly enjoy coming to school because most lessons are interesting, challenging and fun. Parents confirm that their children enjoy school. The wide range of courses offered ensures that individual needs are catered for. Extra-curricular and enrichment activities also provide for a broad spectrum of interests, students very much appreciate the time and effort which staff put into these and take full advantage of them. Even in the occasional dull lesson, students bring their own enthusiasm and make sure that they learn well. Students are very attentive, keen to participate and work together particularly well in pairs and groups. Most teachers have very high expectations of how hard students will work and plan lessons to ensure that students will succeed.
10. The attitudes to learning demonstrated by students with special educational needs are very good, both in their lessons in the learning support department and in classrooms. This is supported by the inclusive ethos of the school where teachers have high expectations of behaviour and learning.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.3	School data	0.2
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

11. Levels of attendance are in the top ten percent of schools nationally. The curriculum caters for students' needs, teachers make it 'cool to learn' and success, in whatever field, is celebrated, so that students are keen to come to school and only stay away when they are really ill. The school has very good systems for monitoring and recording attendance. Everyone registers as soon as morning school starts. This is an improvement since the last inspection and ensures that, in case of emergency, everyone can be accounted for. Punctuality is very dependent on the buses as so many

students live at a considerable distance from the school. During the day, lessons start and finish on time, though some lessons finish a little early at the end of the day.

12. Adults provide excellent role models for students in the way they interact in a very positive manner, obviously valuing each individual and his or her point of view. In response, students listen very well to each other, work very constructively in pairs and groups and behave in a very responsible manner around the school. There is very little bullying or harassment. Students say it is a safe place to be and there are plenty of adults or sixth formers they would be confident to approach for help. Relationships throughout the school are excellent. Many students commented, in their questionnaire returns, on the friendly atmosphere in the school. Levels of exclusion are very low. There have been no permanent exclusions in the past year and only 14 students on fixed term exclusions. Internal exclusion is used with caution and to good effect.

**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	1317	25	0
White – Irish	3	0	0
White – any other White background	22	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	5	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	13	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	9	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	30	0	0

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

13. Students experience residential visits in each of their first three years in the school. The adventurous activities week, for Year 7 soon after starting school, provides an exciting challenge and enables them to get to know the other students in their tutor group well. Year 8 students camp and undertake fieldwork in The Scilly Isles. Year 9 students go to Europe to develop team-working and life skills. These experiences contribute particularly effectively to students' moral and social development as well as providing opportunities for spiritual and cultural development. Year 7 are expected to volunteer to work in their own local community, out of school hours. These, and many other opportunities enable students to become very confident, polite and considerate young people. Parents are very pleased with the way in which the school helps their children to mature. Inspectors were particularly impressed with the way students held doors open, not only for adults but also for each other. The strong Christian ethos of the school is very evident and contributes to the high levels of understanding of moral issues. The personal, health and social education (PHSE) course, taught by three members of staff, builds relationships with teachers that allow students to consider difficult, personal issues openly and confidently. Assemblies provide good opportunities for both moral and spiritual development both through the atmosphere they create and their themes such as HIV/AIDS, or the poor in Third World countries. Students give generously to a number of charities and clearly understand the rationale behind them. Their spiritual and cultural development is fostered particularly well through music and art, as exemplified in students' work on *Guernica* by Picasso.

## **Sixth form**

Attitudes, attendance and behaviour are excellent.

### **Main strengths**

- Main school strengths are continued in the sixth form
- Students are good role models for younger students and take on high levels of responsibility
- Many students are keen to learn and work conscientiously, when out of the classroom, to support their own learning

### **Commentary**

14. All sixth form students are expected to set a good example and take an active role in the school and so, apart from the head girl and head boy, there are no official positions. Students live up to these expectations. The sixth form forum has discussed learning styles with teachers and this has led to improvements in lessons. They have been involved in interviewing prospective teachers. Some have been trained, through the University of Exeter APAUSE scheme, to help deliver part of the sex education programme in Year 9. Others have learnt listening skills and offer a listening/counselling service while others help Years 7 and 8 in a paired reading scheme. Several run extra-curricular activities throughout the school. This high level of very responsible involvement makes a major contribution to students' personal development.
15. Students in Year 12 are required to stay in school for all except a half day home study period. Year 13 can study at home during free periods, unless their grades cause concern. There is a clear signing in and out process so that all students can be accounted for. Attendance in the sixth form is excellent, as in the main school. Almost all students complete the courses they undertake.
16. Students appreciate and take the opportunities to use equipment and study in their non-taught time. They demonstrate good independent learning although some need a little more encouragement than others. Their attitudes and commitment, combined with the quality of teaching they receive, result in very good academic results and students who are well prepared for continuing success in the next stage of their education.

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

The quality of education provided by the school is very good in both the main school and the sixth form. Teaching, and the opportunities for learning within the curriculum, are very good. The school takes very good care of students, who are very well supported in their learning and development, particularly in the sixth form.

### **Teaching and learning**

In the main school, students are very well taught and they learn very well. The teaching observed in Years 10 and 11 was a little better than that seen in Years 7 to 9. Assessment is good. Students' work is accurately marked but students in Years 10 and 11 are clearer about what they need to do to improve their work than in the earlier years.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and this is used to provide students with well planned, purposeful lessons
- Students' excellent attitudes contribute to very effective learning
- There is a consistency in subject teaching, which is generally good or very good
- Teachers use a wide variety of methods to make sure that lessons are challenging for all students
- Older students are better informed on how to improve their work than younger ones

## Commentary

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 110 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (6%)	42 (38%)	44 (39%)	19 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

17. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection due to the sustained drive to improve students' learning and the teaching which would achieve it. The proportion of very good or excellent teaching has increased almost five-fold and no unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Teaching, and the subsequent learning, are at least good in all subjects. They are very good in Years 10 and 11 in design and technology, music, physical education and engineering, and across the school in English, mathematics, art, geography, history, and ICT. At least 95 per cent of parents and of students said, in their questionnaires, that teaching was good. These are high proportions.
18. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subjects they teach and understand examination requirements very well. Teachers' in-depth knowledge helps them to avoid anticipated difficulties by illustrative examples, and this leads to students' deeper understanding. They plan lessons very well to make sure all pupils are given suitable learning activities. Grouping students according to earlier attainment helps in this process in several subjects. Weaker students are helped to develop their writing skills by clear guidance and structure. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and this helps to provide vibrant lessons that inspire and engage students, through group or paired work, the use of video, computer-projected presentations and humour. Encouraging students to be self-evaluative helps them become more independent in their learning. Homework is used effectively to consolidate learning. The school's intranet provides information to support home-based learning.
19. The use of recommendations from the National Key Stage 3 strategy is apparent in most lessons, not just in Years 7 to 9 but throughout the school. In the majority of lessons, what is expected that students will learn is clearly expressed and shared with them. These learning outcomes are used during the lesson, and particularly at the end, to help students recognise when and what they are learning. They also help the teacher to evaluate how successful learning has been and if there is a need to re-visit or clarify a teaching point. The lesson structure gives a stimulus to help capture students' imagination at the start of lessons and provides a good link to the main learning activities.
20. Teachers manage behaviour well and insist upon high standards within the classroom. The very good relationships between teachers and students add to the purposeful atmosphere in which students can learn. Students are self-disciplined, well-motivated to learn and able to work independently on note taking and research. The pace and challenge of lessons aid their learning.
21. All aspects of teaching are strong. Many lessons demonstrate several of these. Where many strands come together, the teaching may well be excellent. For example, in a mixed-ability class in history, Year 7 students were considering the legacy of the Romans. Initially, students were having to guess the word 'legacy' from clues the teacher gave. Subsequently, a clip from a satirical video immediately grabbed their interest, after which they worked in pairs to decide which of a list of possible developments they thought had been started by the Romans. This resulted in high-quality discussion, drawing on their previous learning. Carefully pre-selected groups began to plan research in preparation for a future presentation to their peers. The variety and challenge in this lesson fully involved the very wide range of ability in the class. Their enthusiasm was very evident, the resulting behaviour excellent and they made rapid gains in knowledge and understanding.
22. The individual education plans (IEPs) for students with special educational needs contain good advice, for subject teachers, on strategies for engaging students and helping them to participate in lessons. Learning support assistants (LSAs) play a strong role in helping students to stay on task and to be attentive. Overall, teachers are very effective in ensuring that these students are fully included in class work. Specialist teaching, in the learning support centre, is very good and a strength of the provision is the close attention given to individual student's needs. Key learning skills such as spelling, reading and handwriting are consolidated well. Care and attention are given to helping students to develop their social skills. This results in students responding confidently to the high expectations and challenging targets set by their teachers.

23. The whole-school thrust to develop students' learning skills is at an early stage. Use of the *Thinking Skills Toolkit* is just beginning. Nevertheless, there are many occasions when students are being expected to be able to think, and therefore improve their learning, but which they may not specifically recognise. Thinking skills are inherent in the very strong design process in design and technology. Teaching in art encourages and requires student reflection, again a thinking process. In English, poetry explores a range of language symbolism which challenges students to think about the development of language, and leads to well-argued responses. On many occasions, teachers were observed asking probing questions and requiring explanation and justification in students' responses, rather than monosyllabic replies.
24. Since the previous inspection much work has been done on analysing data from assessments and examinations and putting it into a form in which teachers can use it more readily. Such information is used very well to set individual student end-of-key-stage targets and, from these, whole school and subject targets. Subject teachers set clear end of year targets based on these. Parents and students are kept very well informed of these targets and the extent to which they are being achieved at each assessment. Faculty and departmental heads are kept equally well informed about progress towards their targets. Form tutors have all the information they need for individual student monitoring and discussion with parents. This whole structure is very effective.
25. The quality of routine marking is better in Years 10 and 11, where examination criteria are explicit, than in Years 7 to 9. School policy requires assessment but does not specify marking procedures. Faculties are free to develop their own models. As a result, routine marking, in contrast to periodic set pieces of work, does not always inform students of the National Curriculum level that the work represents. Students are not as clear, therefore, about what they specifically need to do to improve. In the upper years, annotations on students' recorded work give clear indication of the level of a piece of work and good guidance on what is necessary for work to be judged to be at a higher level. Students are very clear on what they need to do to produce work of a higher standard and this contributes well to their eventual examination success.

### Sixth form

Overall teaching is very good and this leads to very good learning in most subjects. Assessment is very effective. Students' work is well marked and they understand very clearly how to improve.

### Main strengths

- There is a high proportion of excellent or very good teaching
- A wide range of teaching strategies is used to prepare students well for examination success
- Students are generally well informed about their progress and how they can improve their standards

### Commentary

26. Teaching in the sixth form continues to reflect the strengths in the teaching observed in the main school. The subject expertise of teachers and their knowledge and understanding of examination requirements enable them to prepare their students well for examination success. As in the main school, the quality of learning is also a reflection of the effort that students put into their studies and their willingness to spend time working on their own. Teachers recognise that different students learn best in different ways and use appropriate teaching strategies. Teaching is rigorous in maintaining an impetus towards examination targets and is good or very good in almost all focus subjects. In theatre studies, teaching is satisfactory because, although there is strength in the theoretical side of the subject, too little is done to develop students' dramatic skills so that they can put theory into practice.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 53 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (2%)	25 (47%)	21 (40%)	6 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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



27. Marking is effective, and students know the grade at which they are working and receive regular feedback from teachers. The regular testing and the subsequent mentoring ensures that students are very well aware of their standard, the progress they are making towards their targets and what they need to do to raise the standard of their work.

### **The curriculum**

The curriculum meets the needs of students very well and offers an excellent range of enhancements to the taught curriculum. Overall, staffing, accommodation and learning resources support the curriculum very well.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Regular and rigorous review of the curriculum helps to meet students' changing needs
- Personal development is promoted through a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education, citizenship and the ethos of the school
- The curriculum meets the requirements of the National Curriculum well
- Accommodation meets the needs of the curriculum well, although it has some relatively weaker aspects

### **Commentary**

28. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is good. Appropriate times are given for the teaching of the different subjects. Students study either French or German as a first language and able linguists in Year 9 can study a second language within the time allocated to languages and thus with no detriment to their other subjects. Some students arrive with very low literacy skills and attainment in English but the structure within the teaching of English leads to rapid progress being made without the need for booster classes. Other recommendations of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, for example the writing, sharing and evaluating of learning objectives, have been widely adopted and are effectively raising achievement.
29. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is very good. A large common core to the curriculum ensures that all students have a balanced education. In this, choice within languages and design and technology allows for individuality. The opportunity to choose an additional two subjects, within reasonable guidelines, enables students to further tailor their study to meet their needs and aspirations. The curriculum ensures that all students study at least one course of a vocational nature. An alternative curriculum, taught in conjunction with the local further education college, meets the needs of a small group of students, for whom a totally academic curriculum is inappropriate, and helps them to gain useful accreditations.
30. The provision made for all students with special educational needs is very effective. The specialist provision is well structured and focused on meeting individual needs. The criteria for supporting the different categories on the register of need are clearly established and published in the governors' report to parents.
31. The school makes very good provision for personal, social and health education. The scheme of work covers all aspects of health education. It is taught throughout Years 7 to 9 as a discrete course by a team of three teachers. As a result, there is a consistency in teaching, at least good and frequently better, and a continuity to what students experience. Students learn well. The school uses the APAUSE sex education programme, which is closely monitored by the University of Exeter, and makes very good use of the school nurse and sixth form students to support this.
32. Curriculum provision is kept under regular review and plans are well advanced for moving towards a pattern of educational routes for Year 10 students beginning in September 2005. This will not affect the clear pathway leading to post 16 provision but will reduce the plethora of examinations that students face. It is planned to strengthen the link between school and college, found to be effective in the current pilot programme. The school is using the increased flexibility, now permitted in Years 10 and 11, to the benefit of its students.
33. The opportunities the school provides for enrichment are excellent. All departments identify, and publish in their documentation to parents, opportunities that support learning in their subject. These may be annual trips and visits or weekly events. The school offers a large number of activities over the course of the week, in physical education, sports and music. These are very popular with

students and large numbers take the opportunities. Additionally, large numbers take advantage of opportunities for instrumental tuition. These activities make important contributions to students' personal development and subject achievement. All students in each of Years 7, 8 and 9 have a residential opportunity both in this country and abroad. These make particular contributions to students' personal development as well as supporting subject learning in different and exciting contexts. Additional opportunities for students include Maths Challenge, World Class tests and themed enhancement days, for example to extend learning in modern languages, opera and enterprise education. ATAG students are encouraged to gain membership of the Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth and to participate in its activities, such as the summer school. Students and parents speak highly of these opportunities. As one parent commented, 'There is no reason why any student should not find something to do.'

34. The match of teachers' expertise and experience to curriculum needs ensures all students are taught effectively. This match is particularly strong in art. Teaching staff are well supported by a well-managed team of associate staff. Financial resources have been effectively used to provide associate staff in all faculties to assist in routine administrative tasks thus beginning to implement national initiatives in workforce reform and free teachers to spend more energy on educational developments. The learning resources available for teaching are very good, overall, although only satisfactory in science. The provision of the new technology, computers, laptops, interactive whiteboards and data projectors, is a major strength with an above average ratio of equipment to student. The equipment is heavily and effectively used although, despite the seeming abundance, some subject areas find difficulty in accessing what they need when they need it. Accommodation provision is good but variable. For example, sports and technology provision is of a high quality but some laboratories, some corridors and the library, for a school of this size, are barely satisfactory. The accommodation is well maintained and graffiti free.

### **Sixth form**

Curriculum opportunities in the sixth form are very good. The match of teachers to curriculum need is very good and accommodation is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students have a wide choice of courses from which they can create their individual curriculum
- Extra-curricular opportunities, specifically for sixth formers, contribute very well to their personal development and learning
- Individual curriculum events make a limited contribution to students' religious education

### **Commentary**

35. This is recognised as an academic sixth form. The wide range of GCE and AVCE courses meets the needs and aspirations of the students very well. The size of the sixth form means that some small groups, financially unviable in smaller sixth forms, can be supported. The curriculum builds well on students' experience in Years 10 and 11 and provides a good base for subsequent entry to university; the destination of nearly all the students. The provision is broadened by regular 'stop the clock' days when, the curriculum being suspended, a conference or presentation focuses on a specific topic. It is through this programme, for example, that the school seeks to meet its obligation to provide religious education to all sixth form students.
36. As in the main school, all subjects identify and publicise subject based enhancement opportunities. Opportunities, specifically for the sixth form, to experience international travel have an important impact on learning, personal development and enjoyment. Many of the range of activities, particularly sporting and musical, available to the younger students are also available to sixth form students. Student volunteers, after appropriate training, are involved in paired reading to support Year 7 and 8 students. Others make an important contribution to the APAUSE sex education programme in the main school. Yet others initiate and run clubs for main school students. These peer education opportunities greatly enhance these students' personal development. They play an important part in creating and sustaining the friendly whole-school atmosphere that many younger students and parents recognise and upon which they comment so favourably.

37. The sixth form benefits from the same teaching and associate staffing strengths as the main school. The sixth form has its own identifiable centre which, although now quite tight with the numbers of students involved, is appreciated by many students both for the social opportunities it provides as well as a place to study. Accommodation for sixth form art is very restricted and yet, despite this, students achieve very well. Students have generally ready access to any 'free' computers anywhere within the school to support them in their learning. Students have restricted space for individual study.

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

The school is a community with a common purpose and makes very good provision for the care, welfare and health and safety of its students. The provision of support and guidance is very good and there are good arrangements for involving students and responding to their views.

### **Main strengths**

- The school makes every effort to provide a safe environment for students
- Induction procedures are very effective in ensuring students settle quickly and happily
- The monitoring of students' progress is very good and leads to appropriate guidance and intervention
- Students receive good advice as they move into Year 10 and the post 16 sector
- Students have good opportunities to voice their opinions and play an increasing part in the development of the school

### **Commentary**

38. The whole staff is highly committed to providing a caring atmosphere in which all students are valued and have a voice. Child protection procedures are organised effectively, in line with locally agreed procedures, with an assistant headteacher taking the lead role, supported by other key staff. All have received suitable training. Good systems, followed by all staff, seek to ensure the correct and safe use of the Internet. The school has a healthy school award and promotes healthy living through the PSHE programme. It works closely with parents and the school council over concerns that either may raise.
39. Governors have established a health and safety committee with representation covering all faculties and off-site provision. Key managers ensure that all statutory safety checks are carried out and that there are effective systems to deal with the prevention of accidents. The school has sufficient first aiders and careful recording ensures all qualifications are up to date. Staff understand their responsibilities for health and safety and technicians are kept informed about all procedures and legal expectations. This aspect of school provision is monitored well and training to meet statutory requirements is ensured.
40. Links with the primary sector are very strong and the programme of visits by staff and future students leads to smooth and effective transfer to what can seem to be a dauntingly large school. Parents speak very highly of their children's experience of this process. An early residential experience for Year 7 students helps students and form tutors to get to know each other well. Students feel the school is a welcoming and happy place, teachers are helpful and there is always someone they can turn to if they have a problem. Form tutors work closely with their students and know them well. Year heads maintain a good overview of the students in their charge. Regular meetings identify students experiencing personal or behavioural problems so that appropriate action may be taken at an early stage. The students benefit from a chaplain who is available to give pastoral support.
41. Students' work is assessed on a regular basis. Their progress towards the targets set for them is monitored closely. Students and their parents are kept regularly informed of these outcomes. Through the strong mentoring system all students have an annual interview to review progress towards their targets. Potentially underachieving students are identified and appropriate action taken. Monitoring intensifies, appropriately, as examinations approach.
42. Rigorous attention is paid, by the learning support department, to ensure that students with special educational needs keep up with class work and homework. LSAs provide good general support, in lessons, for students with the greatest identified needs and the school recognises the need to extend their subject knowledge and understanding. The school benefits from the external specialist

support services, for example for students with hearing impairment and physical difficulties. Seminar sessions are used well to disseminate the good practice, developed in some faculties, to help teachers further improve the support they provide in their lessons. The assessment of students with special educational needs is very good and fully meets the requirements of the Code of Practice. IEPs for students have specific and measurable targets. Reviews are held regularly for students with statements and good efforts are made to involve parents of students on school action and school action plus. Secure systems identify needs at entry to the school, through liaison with primary schools, and within the school, through regular monitoring reviews between learning support and faculties.

43. Careers education and guidance is included in the PSHE programme for all students. Very full information, for parents and students, helps students in their choice of subjects for Year 10. Good planning takes place for work experience in Year 11. The sixth form induction course, for Year 11 students, provides a very good opportunity for students to understand the requirements and challenges of advanced study. During the residential course, students are given appropriate advice about future careers and other courses. Advice is impartial although nearly all students choose to continue into the sixth form. All students with special educational needs are given personal interviews with a Connexions personal adviser and all students have the opportunity for individual careers interviews. As a result, very few students change or leave their course after they transfer to the sixth form.
44. The school is committed to involving the students in all aspects of its work and is keen to know what students think. Students' views are listened to through the school council, itself run by students. The council raises and discusses domestic issues such as the cost of healthy foods, and is now beginning to involve students in discussions about teaching and learning. All faculties have undertaken a *learning review* to report on learning from a student perspective. Each has chosen its own methodology but has clearly involved students' views. ATAG students have given a presentation to staff, followed by effective discussion, on what makes a good lesson for them. Students from all years are involved with showing candidates for new staff appointments around the school and the school seeks their views on the suitability of the candidates.

### **Sixth form**

There are excellent procedures for support and guidance in the sixth form and the school makes very good provision for involving students and acting on their views.

### **Main strengths**

- The system of individual guidance through student mentoring is effective in supporting students during their time in the sixth form and preparing them for their next stage
- The sixth form forum is a positive feature in involving students in contributing to the operation and development of the sixth form and the school

### **Commentary**

45. The very good induction arrangements help students to understand the expectations of the sixth form. Form tutors provide support on a daily basis and monitor attendance. In Year 12 there are excellent arrangements for all students to have a personal mentor who offers support regarding all aspects of school life. Mentor and student meet very regularly to review the current level of performance and progress towards the student's predicted grade. Key senior staff receive a detailed account of students' progress and, as necessary, additional support and guidance are given for underperformance. The mentor role is central to the induction process in ensuring that students are suitably focused on their courses. The school seeks to develop independent study skills although, because of limited private study accommodation, students are encouraged to plan independent work at home. The form tutors and mentors carefully monitor this process to ensure time is used wisely.
46. Very good guidance is given and a wealth of material is available to help students in their choices at the end of Year 13. These are particularly strong for university choice, the destination for the majority of students, but not as detailed for those for whom this will not be the appropriate choice. The highest-attaining students are supported well in their university application through a joint programme of mock interviews with Uppingham School.

47. The sixth form forum offers students a platform for expressing their views about the sixth form and the school. The school both raises issues for debate in the forum and responds to ideas about teaching and learning. As a result, the mentoring system was introduced and a number of variations to courses were made.

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

The school has forged very good links with parents and other schools, and links with the wider community are excellent.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school and parents work in close co-operation for the benefit of students
- Parents are kept very well informed with the exception of the quality of the information about students' progress
- Links with the wider community are beneficial both to the community and students
- The links with other schools contribute particularly towards smooth transition into and from the school

### **Commentary**

48. The school provides parents with a large quantity of high-quality information about what their children will be learning and events at school. Whether they have children about to start, choosing options or considering the sixth form, the information they are given is comprehensive and detailed. Every year group has a curriculum booklet which explains each subject's topics, homework and enrichment activities and also encourages parents to support their child's learning in that area. Weekly newsletters keep parents fully abreast of events and activities. Parents say they have no hesitation in approaching the school with concerns, knowing they will be received well and their concern will be dealt with.
49. The school reports to parents three times a year about their children's progress. Two reports are relatively brief and complement the required annual report well. Parents are left in no doubt about the targets towards which their children are aiming and the most recent level at which they are working. They are well-informed about the effort and commitment their child is making. The annual reports include short comments on each subject but parents would like these to be fuller and more obviously referring to the specific student. The inspectors agree. Parents would also welcome the opportunity to speak directly to subject teachers earlier than in Year 9, as at present. Through its own questionnaire, the school had already identified these issues and is looking at ways of tackling them.
50. Parents are very supportive of the school. For example, recently when it became apparent that bus facilities were being withdrawn, a group of parents immediately took on the task of ensuring that current and future students from the wide area could continue to get to school. The Friends of Bishop Stopford are another very active group, planning fund-raising and social events. Considerable sums of money are raised to provide extra facilities for the students, for example, the bean bags for a reading group in the library. Such high levels of support help to ensure that students attend regularly and that homework is done.
51. Excellent links with the wider community have developed since the last inspection. All teachers have had the opportunity to visit a business related to their area of responsibility and many reported significant benefits. Many of these links have been maintained and developed. Year 7 students are helped to find some form of community service to undertake in their own time. Throughout the school there are many and varied opportunities for students to become involved locally, for example through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, through work experience opportunities or working with the elderly. An increasing number of people come into school to talk about their work, particularly in the PHSE course. Many of these links come under the umbrella of the flourishing Stopford Partnership, a joint venture between the school and community partners. Local charities have benefited from fund raising activities by students and they, in turn, have learnt of the activities of the charity. Links with other community agencies support the work of the SEN team. All these links are having a significant impact on the work of the school as a whole and on students' learning.

52. As part of its technology college status, in addition to maintaining the emphasis upon subjects within the school, the school is looking outwards. Pilot work is being undertaken in the provision of adult education courses for the immediate neighbourhood, a relatively disadvantaged area. It was support from the local community, particularly industrial concerns, that enabled the school to be successful in its initial bid some ten years ago. The contacts have been maintained and developed. One of these links had allowed the senior leadership team to spend time looking at management in an industrial context but with benefit in the educational setting. The school is working closely with the Specialist Schools' Trust contributing to national conferences and journals. A teacher is currently seconded for the equivalent of one day a week to the Trust as a lead practitioner in health and social care. As such, the school is contributing to educational practice both nationally and internationally.
53. The school draws students from over 70 primary schools and tries to visit them all. Good information is passed on so that appropriate tutor groups can be planned and teachers know at what level students have been working. The strength and quality of these links result in a very smooth transfer from the small primary into the large secondary school. The community action initiative has resulted in the appointment of a sports co-ordinator. The school's sports facilities are open for community use but the co-ordinator works with and supports local primary schools. They in turn support students seeking to achieve community sports leader awards. Some primary schools benefit from the ICT expertise of staff at Bishop Stopford. Links with community agencies, such as the Connexions service, support students well in their transition from main school into the sixth form. Some sixth form students join with Uppingham School for mock university interviews to help them better prepare for the move from school to higher education.
54. The school has recently joined a national register of schools set up to provide nationwide support and guidance for whole-school strategic leadership and management of ICT. The school leads a Leading Edge Partnership in which it works with and supports three other local schools, one of which is a special school, in design and technology. These schools benefit a great deal from the links. Bishop Stopford staff learn more teaching strategies for lower-attaining students and students may be taught at another school where staff are better able to cater for specific learning difficulties. This is an improving area since the last inspection.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Governance is very good. Leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. The quality of leadership by the senior staff and others with leadership responsibilities is very good. Management is very effective.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher's leadership is dynamic and inspirational
- The school's Christian ethos has a profound influence on the day-to-day life of the school and on its responsibility to the wider educational community
- Excellent teamwork helps to maintain the school's very high reputation and continues to raise standards
- Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses and are very effective in their role as critical friend
- The leadership and management of a few subjects lack drive

### **Commentary**

55. Through the headteacher's dynamic determination and relentless focus on teaching and learning, standards have improved and weaker areas, identified in the last inspection report, are now strengths. Through the Specialist Schools' Trust and the Leading Edge Partnership, the headteacher and senior staff are helping other schools to improve. The school's work and achievements have won it an excellent reputation in the local community and made it extremely popular with parents. Increasingly its work and reputation are gaining wider recognition, both in this country and abroad.

56. Through her involvement in local and national initiatives the headteacher has brought the staff into contact with a wide range of educational and industrial communities and environments. There have been positive benefits, for senior leaders and other staff and therefore to students, helping to shape a management structure and build a team of staff that are responsive and able to meet the challenges the school is facing.
57. Governors have a very good and perceptive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and, through their role as critical friend they both support and challenge the school in its drive for excellence. Governors have been highly successful in shaping and defining the school's future and have not stood back when difficult decisions have had to be made. The Christian ethos, which has a profound impact on the day-to-day life of the school, is a feature of the way the governors see the school contributing to the work of the diocese and the wider educational community. They strongly support and encourage the school to share its experiences and expertise with other schools as a means of realising their wider ambitions and vision. The dialogue and genuine openness that comes from learning from, and influencing others, permeates the leadership and management at all levels and is a key strength of the school.
58. The headteacher, senior staff and governors have demonstrated their considerable knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Faculty and key stage reviews are searching and thorough. The outcomes inform whole school planning and have had an important impact on the continuing improvements being made. School priorities are very appropriate. Self-evaluation, and its accuracy and actions to tackle weaknesses, are excellent.
59. The headteacher leads a very effective and highly motivated team of senior and middle managers whose ambitions and aspirations for the school are shared by teachers and associate staff alike. There is no sense of complacency. The drive and determination to continue to build on the school's considerable achievements is a feature of the excellent teamwork. The headteacher's vision - for the school to be a professional learning community - and the extent to which this has been achieved, are features of its success.
60. Year leaders and leaders of faculties are largely very effective in managing the school's key priorities. There are examples of very good role models and ambitious plans and approaches on how whole school goals and targets can be realised. Subject development plans clearly reflect the whole school priorities and identify appropriate pathways for their implementation. However, across and within subjects, there are some inconsistencies in the quality and effectiveness of leadership and management. Although most subjects are well or very well led and managed, some subject leaders have been less imaginative and slower than others in looking for ways to improve teaching and learning. In a minority of subjects the way tasks have been managed has not been sufficiently robust to enable students' learning and achievements to be monitored closely enough.
61. The leadership and management of the SEN department is very good. Leadership has established effective and efficient systems, in partnership with subject departments, which ensure that the needs of students are identified and their progress towards IEP targets are monitored regularly. There is very good improvement, since the last inspection, with regard to the key issue and the specific points for improvement. Roles and responsibilities are now clearly defined in the school's SEN policy; the partnership developed between learning support and faculties has resulted in a coherent whole school approach to meeting students' needs and criteria for identifying SEN are now clear. Student reviews are held regularly and good efforts are made to involve parents. The deployment of LSAs and teachers is now effective in meeting needs both in class and in withdrawal lessons. The school is well placed to make further improvements in provision and areas for development which have been appropriately identified in the action plan.
62. Leadership and management of ICT across the whole school are excellent. Senior managers have a very clear vision of what they want to achieve in the longer term. There is a drive for continuous improvement and the seminar group is a very good forum for teachers from all departments to discuss issues such as using ICT to best effect in teaching.
63. The school induction programme for newly qualified teachers is very good. The school supports the initial training of teachers very well and is making effective use of the graduate teacher scheme to develop its own staff. Performance management is fully operational and the identified needs are well met by a substantial programme of professional development. The associate staff are well

managed and their professional needs recognised and tackled. The school has had its Investor in People (IIP) status re-affirmed. The seminar group strategy allows cross-curricular teams of teachers to come together to tackle an identified issue or interest. Work done within these groups is very effectively disseminated to others and has been a very important means of improving provision. Similarly, the regular meeting of cross-curricular groups in training and professional development sessions has proved to be a successful strategy towards achieving whole school consistency.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,173,879	Balance from previous year	408,040
Total expenditure	5,110,226	Balance carried forward to the next	471,693
Expenditure per student	3569		

64. Financial management is very effectively helping the school to plan for and achieve its goals. The systems the school has put in place work very well, are accessible to staff and governors and are regularly monitored and updated where necessary. Grants and specific funds are allocated appropriately and their use closely monitored. The school strongly believes in and ensures that spending provides good value. Through its constant review of provision, its drive to improve and its seeking of student and parent perceptions, the school is applying 'best value' principles very well. The incoming resources and the standard of education provided by the school point to the school providing very good value for money.

**Sixth form**

Leadership of the sixth form is very good and it is very well managed. Governance is very good.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership of the sixth form and of a significant number of subjects is very good
- There is a shared understanding and excellent teamwork to tackle areas of concern
- Leadership and management of a few subjects has not kept pace with whole school improvements

**Commentary**

65. As in the main school, leadership of the sixth form is very good. Staff have a very secure overview of achievement. Examination predictions and results trigger actions and provide information that is used to monitor teaching and groups of students and individuals where necessary. Additional information is derived through students' views and comments.
66. Self-evaluation is very secure. There is a corporate view about improvement, very good communication and excellent teamwork to address any concerns. The year heads play a very effective part in monitoring students' academic progress and personal development through the school's central recording and monitoring systems. All these, and other aspects of the monitoring process, are generally very effective and greatly appreciated by students. In the majority of subjects, improvement since the last inspection is judged to have been good and leadership, towards meeting the school priorities, very good. In a small number of subjects, either leadership was not dynamic or management not efficient and responsive enough to keep pace with whole school developments.
67. Governors are aware of their responsibilities and fully meet their statutory responsibilities. They follow the students' achievements closely and know which subjects and aspects of the sixth form are working well and where improvements are possible. Governors are currently reviewing the benefits of appointing a governor whose prime responsibility is to oversee the work of the sixth form as a way of increasing their own effectiveness.



## **OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES**

### **Work related learning**

The provision for work-related learning (WRL) is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership is very good and development is rapid
- Careers education is well organised and work experience and visits from employers are very effective
- The vocational subjects play a significant role in developing students' awareness of the world of work although aspects of work related learning are not yet an integral part of all other subjects

### **Commentary**

68. All students take the GCSE in information and communication technology and over a hundred take a second vocational option. Students' results are significantly above the national average in these subjects. Students are generally well motivated to learn about work and, in discussion and from their recorded work, many have a very good understanding of aspects of the workplace, such as health and safety, local employment and changes happening in the world of work. The Year 11 students, who took part in the Pathfinder Business Enterprise project last year are secure in their understanding of business, such as key roles at work, the importance of team work and effective presentation skills. This very successful enterprise project will involve all Year 9 students later in the academic year.
69. The school's programme for WRL has been carefully planned in accordance with national guidance. Part of the programme is taught through tutor time. The plans, guidance and resources provided for tutors are of high quality. More than half the teachers had a one day placement in industry last year. Teachers gained a better knowledge and understanding of employers' requirements and conditions in the work place and the activity gave impetus to the development of WRL across the curriculum. Departments, such as English, languages and ICT, develop understanding of business or work within their teaching, or use work as a context for learning activities to exemplify the subject's relevance. Other subject departments have yet to implement a work-related dimension, an issue that has been identified by the school as an area for development.
70. Work experience is well planned and feedback from businesses offering placements and from Year 11 students taking part is generally very positive, even from students who did not get their first choice of placement. Preparation and debriefing for those on work experience are good. Visits to the school by a wide range of employers take place regularly and these have a significant impact on developing awareness of local and national businesses. The 'stop the clock' conferences for all vocational students make a very good contribution to raising students' awareness.
71. Students have good careers guidance, including opportunities for individual interviews through the Connexions service. Those Year 11 students interviewed said they were happy with the support they were receiving. They are guided well, both about progression to post-16 and about future careers. There is a clear vision for WRL and leadership is very good. Assessment systems are in place, but little evidence has been recorded to date. This aspect of education only became a requirement in September and so these very recent developments have had little time to impact on standards.

## 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

English was inspected in detail. Drama lessons were sampled.

Provision in English is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since the last inspection	Good	

##### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well as a result of enthusiastic and highly structured teaching
- Relationships in English lessons are very good
- Very strong leadership gives clear direction to the teaching
- Some of the teaching in drama has insufficient pace and challenge

##### Commentary

##### Examination results

72. In 2004, the results of the national tests for students aged 14 were well above the national median, continuing the trend of steady improvement since 2001. They were above the median for similar schools. In both 2003 and 2004, girls' results were better than boys', but the differences were broadly in line with the national pattern.
73. In 2004, GCSE results in English language were well above the national and similar schools' medians. Results in English literature were significantly above the national average. Both were a little lower than the previous year. Contrary to the national pattern, the percentage of boys gaining at least a C grade was higher, in both subjects, than the percentage of girls.

##### Standards and achievement

74. When students join the school, their attainment in English is well above average. This standard is maintained throughout Years 7 to 11. Standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening are thus well above average. Students with special educational needs achieve very well because they receive carefully focused help from teaching assistants who work very closely with teachers. Higher-attaining students respond well to challenging texts, and a pattern of lessons that offers them many opportunities to discuss issues and explore ideas. Older, lower-attaining students achieve very well because lessons are very well attuned to the way they learn, for example by the incorporation of information and communications technology. This helps to raise their standards.

##### Teaching and learning

75. A very comprehensive scheme of work provides a strong framework for planning by individual teachers. Planning is heavily influenced by the government's strategy for raising the attainment of younger secondary students (the Key Stage 3 Strategy). Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and contain a range of activities so that students can learn in a variety of ways.
76. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and convey a genuine interest, both in the subject and in students' progress. Teachers' aims are clearly explained to students and revisited at the end of lessons. In a very good Year 11 lesson, the teacher outlined the overall theme to the students who then helped to work out the precise objectives. A very good feature of the assessment of students'

work is that, at the end of each unit, students comment on their own performance and, in co-operation with the teacher, work out how they can improve. Students are well aware of their likely National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, and are encouraged to have high aspirations.

77. Students approach lessons in a mature and responsible manner. They are keen to be involved and the very good relationships in classrooms give them the confidence to participate fully in lessons. Their levels of concentration are uniformly high. Students can word-process, use desktop publishing and carry out research through the Internet. During the inspection, very good examples were seen of the use of ICT to advance learning. English lessons contribute well to the development of students' broad moral and cultural sensibilities.

### **Leadership and management**

78. The leadership of the subject has a thorough grasp of current student performance in English and has formulated very clear plans to improve standards further. These plans are based on a detailed analysis of statistical data, the monitoring of teaching and the scrutiny of students' written work. As a result, teachers have clear priorities, such as improving students' standards in the poetry section of the GCSE course. There is very good teamwork in the English department. Consequently the students' experience has an overall coherence.
79. The last report noted some unsatisfactory teaching in English. The quality of teaching is now a strength of the subject. High standards have been consolidated and overall improvement since 1999 is thus good.

### **Drama**

80. GCSE results, in 2004, were close to the national average, as they were in 2003. Standards observed in lessons were average and the overall quality of teaching was satisfactory. Some good features were evident. In a Year 11 lesson, one group of students used space intelligently and developed with imagination the role of a narrator parallel to the action. Year 9 students co-operated well in groups to produce successful freeze frames. At times, however, the pace flagged and there was insufficient challenge. Students' overall achievement was satisfactory.
81. The leadership of the subject and the faculty have sound plans to improve standards in drama. These need urgent implementation.

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

82. Students' standards of literacy and language skills are well above average and allow the students full access to the curriculum. The school's provision for literacy is strongly based on the National Key Stage 3 Strategy.
83. Across the curriculum, most teachers pay careful attention to specialist vocabulary. Even younger students, for example, display an ability to use a sophisticated technical vocabulary in music. Some imaginative uses of language were observed, for instance in a science lesson on precious stones, when students were encouraged to respond in poetry. The students' high standards of reading, writing, speaking and listening enable them to achieve very well in their full range of subjects. The accuracy of their writing and their ability to use specialist terminology correctly, contributes directly to high achievement in their ICT coursework.
84. The library is a useful resource, well used by students. About 50 younger students are helped to improve their reading by a systematic programme led by sixth formers.

### **Modern foreign languages**

Students study either French or German in Years 7 and 8. The most linguistically able students start a second language, either French, German or Spanish, in Year 9. Spanish was sampled during the inspection.

Provision in modern languages is good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since the last inspection	Good	

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students develop a wide vocabulary and use it well to write in increasing depth
- Students' very good attitudes support their learning in languages
- Teachers' command of language is used well to develop students' listening skills but insufficient priority is given to extending students' oral skills
- Marking does not sufficiently help student to make progress in Years 7 and 8

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

85. The results of teacher assessments, at the end of Year 9 in 2004, were significantly above those reported nationally in the previous year. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2004, in both French and German, were significantly above average.

#### **Standards and achievement**

86. Students enter the school with average language skills and make modest progress in Year 7. Skills improve noticeably from Year 8 where students are taught in ability groupings with a generous time allocation. Curriculum enhancements, such as foreign trips and reading schemes, are used well to enable them to acquire a wider vocabulary and get to know verb tenses. In Year 10, progress again is steady rather than brisk, partly because some classes have students who have studied the language for one year together with those who started in Year 7. A strong focus on examination requirements raises the pace in Year 11, as students respond positively to appropriately challenging work. In all years, achievement is strongest in listening because students are constantly exposed to the language in the classroom. Lower-attaining students correctly select details from short texts while higher-attaining students demonstrate a good grasp of longer passages and quickly infer the meaning of less familiar words. Year 9 students write with increasing depth on a widening range of topics using their good vocabulary, but accuracy in longer pieces of writing remains a problem for all but the highest-attaining students. Students speak accurately in controlled tasks but are less able to respond spontaneously. Students' independent learning skills are above average as ICT use is improving, and they readily use reference sources and make notes to support their learning.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

87. The conscientious, experienced teachers use their very good language skills effectively to direct learning. Expectations are particularly good in Years 9 and 11. Relationships are strong, as teachers treat students considerately and encourage them to do their best. Lessons are clearly structured, a good pace is maintained and students learn well because they are attentive and maintain concentration over lengthy periods. The extra-curricular opportunities support students' learning well as they can draw on their own experience of foreign visits to give their written and spoken work a personal flavour. Higher-attaining students, especially in Years 10 and 11, are curious about how language works and are more adventurous in its use in writing. Most lessons are pitched at a challenging but realistic level which maintains the confidence and motivation of students at all levels of attainment. When learning is less successful, it is due to over-use of the textbook and a lack of focus on learning outcomes in lesson planning, a weakness which is reflected in schemes of work. The quality of marking and routine assessment is better in the later years than the early ones. Students are clear about the levels at which they are working but are less knowledgeable about how they can improve.

## Leadership and management

88. Leadership is professional and strongly committed to the maintenance of high standards. The subject teams collaborate purposefully. Monitoring has yet to ensure consistency of practice in some aspects, for example marking. Planning has clearly identified appropriate initiatives to improve provision but the criteria for evaluating them are weak. Work has been done to eliminate or improve weaknesses of the previous report. Most notably, standards in Years 8 and 9 have risen considerably.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since the last inspection	Good	

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students obtain well above average test and examination results because of their hard work and the quality of education that they receive
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which is the foundation for their good teaching
- In some teaching, the highest-attaining students are insufficiently challenged

## Commentary

### Examination results

89. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9, in 2004, were well above the national and similar schools' medians, as they have been consistently over recent years. Nearly half the students obtained the highest Levels 7 and 8. Boys and girls performed equally well.
90. GCSE results in 2004 were well above the national median. They were very high (in the top 5 per cent) in comparison with similar schools. This is an improvement on the 2003 results. Overall, results for girls were slightly better than those for boys.

### Standards and achievement

91. Standards seen during the inspection show that students have maintained the above average standards they had on entry to the school. For example, lower-attaining students in Year 9 have a very good knowledge of the properties of polygons, and are able to interpret graphs very well. Higher-attaining students in Year 11 can very capably transform graphs of trigonometric functions, use the trapezium rule very accurately and write very good vector proofs. Students have been provided with their own schemes of work in which they maintain 'can do' lists, and teachers use these and half-termly tests to track students' achievement thoroughly. Progress seen in lessons and in students' recorded work ranged from satisfactory to very good. Higher-attaining students sometimes have to wait in lessons for other students to finish, and sometimes the exercises set do not challenge them sufficiently. Overall, by maintaining their well above standards throughout their course, students achieve very well. Many students participate successfully in national and in-school mathematics competitions.

### Teaching and learning

92. The teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to very good, across all years. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan and teach lessons which are well-structured and include good illustrative examples. The best lessons have a brisk pace which stimulates very good achievement. Teachers of these lessons have fully embraced the National Strategy for Key Stage 3. They use very good lesson starters, design activities and questions which challenge students to think and

learn very well, and close their lessons very effectively. Some teaching, although satisfactory overall, was rather dull and less imaginative and occasionally explanations were not very clear. Teachers do not always encourage the highest-attaining students to develop independently of them at an early enough stage of the lesson. In all cases, including those where teaching was less stimulating, students' diligence ensured they made learning gains which were at least satisfactory and most often, very good. For example, in a very well-taught, enjoyable and well-paced Year 7 lesson on coordinates in all four quadrants, students learned very well as the result of their keenness and cooperation. Students know their targets and they work hard to achieve them but the National Curriculum level of the work being completed is not often reinforced in teaching or marking in the early years. Schemes of work encourage teachers to make good use of ICT in teaching and learning, and students speak positively of their use of ICT within mathematics. The after-school mathematics club supports individual students wanting help. The structure that the teaching provides, the frequent assessments, close monitoring and students' commitment and effort combine to ensure that students learn and achieve very well.

### Leadership and management

93. Very knowledgeable leadership has ensured a shared clarity of vision for the future of the faculty, and a willingness to develop. Since the last inspection, priorities for improvement have been carefully and appropriately identified and the proportion of very good teaching has improved. A set of mathematical investigations has been established for each year group, and considerable effort has been made to improve students' statistics coursework for their GCSE mathematics. Clear guidance is given to teachers through policy documents, schemes of work for each teaching group, an innovative school-designed student progress chart, and helpful and comprehensive lists of resources, including those for ICT. The faculty members function well as a team, and teachers have a culture of sharing good practice.

### Mathematics across the curriculum

94. An extensive, comprehensive and informative policy document has been produced. It helps teachers, across the curriculum, to understand what constitutes numeracy, how various skills are taught, how to use calculators effectively, and an overview of the schemes of work for each year. As a result, provision for students to use and develop numeracy across the curriculum is good, and students show well above average competence in most subjects. In science, students are very skilled in re-arranging equations. In geography, they analyse and interpret graphs very effectively, and handle data with well-above average competence. In art, students show very good spatial awareness and make very effective use of proportion. Well-above average algebraic skills help students to develop their skills in ICT, particularly in their use of spreadsheets.

### SCIENCE

Provision in science is good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since the last inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test and examination results are well above those of similar schools
- Consistently good teaching leads to students learning and achieving well
- Good leadership is leading to better achievement by students
- The science curriculum does not give sufficient emphasis to good quality investigative work

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

95. Results at the end of Year 9, in 2004, were well above the national median and the median for similar schools, as they have been for several years. On average, girls have performed slightly better than boys. Results at GCSE, in 2004, were also well above both national and similar schools' medians. These results were a little higher than those in 2003.

### **Standards and achievement**

96. Year 9 students have a well-above average understanding of the basic chemistry of respiration and photosynthesis and ability to use equations such as the one relating voltage, current and power. Students make good progress and achieve well in relation to their well-above average standards on entry. By Year 11, students show well-above average understanding of the functions of different parts of the eye and knowledge of atomic structure. Students maintain their high standards and achieve well. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Those who are gifted and talented make satisfactory progress.

### **Teaching and learning**

97. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to give clear explanations. Questioning is used well to check students' understanding and, in the strongest teaching, to make students think and predict. Relationships with students are good. Teachers have high expectations and lessons are conducted at a brisk pace with a good variety of activity to engage and sustain students' interest and enthusiasm. A significant amount of observed teaching was very good or better, and progress in these lessons was very good. Such lessons were very well planned and structured, with particularly high levels of challenge and pace which were sustained throughout the lesson. In a Year 7 lesson, students measured the densities of a range of materials and were then expected to explain the differences between various solids, and between solids, liquids and gases in terms of particle theory. In a Year 11 lesson, with a lower set, good questioning led students to predict the outcome of firing alpha particles at a positively charged nucleus. Very effective use was then made of modelling, with students representing the nuclei in gold foil and foam pellets from a toy gun representing the alpha particles. Students quickly related this to their predictions of scattering and the fact that most particles pass through. The recommendations of the National Strategy for Key Stage 3 have been incorporated in teaching, though not yet consistently, and are having a positive impact on learning and achievement. An increasing range of teaching styles and learning activities are used well to engage students and increase their understanding. There is insufficient use of open and extended investigative work to really challenge all students, but particularly the highest-attaining. Students are unable to make sufficient use of ICT, to support their learning, due to a lack of resources. Work is marked regularly but does not always give students the information they need on how to improve. Too little use is made of open questioning and extended writing to develop students' oracy and literacy skills.

### **Leadership and management**

98. Leadership has placed a good emphasis upon improving the quality of teaching and learning. This is reflected in improving achievement and standards. Some good practice deals with spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues but such opportunities are not routinely included in curriculum planning. Good procedures have recently been put in place for sharing good practice, including peer observation and a science department web-site. There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching to give staff regular, professional-development feedback.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since the last inspection	Good	

### Main strengths

- Very good teaching, supported by high-quality, well-structured resources, focuses on independent learning
- Students approaching examinations receive good guidance on how to improve work
- Students make good use of ICT to support learning in other subjects

### Commentary

#### Examination results

99. The results of teacher assessments, at the end of Year 9 in 2004, were very high compared to the median of those reported nationally and well above those reported by similar schools. Until 2003, students have been entered for examination at the end of Year 10. In that year, nearly all students gained distinction, merit or pass grades in the GNVQ examination, although fewer students than anticipated attained at the higher levels. There is no data available to enable comparison of this performance. A change in the course being followed and the time needed to reach examination readiness meant that no Year 10 students were examined in 2004.

#### Standards and achievement

100. Standards on entry to the school are average. Students make rapid progress because they are taught very well. Current Year 9 students have made a very good start to their GCSE course. For example, they have analysed how information on holidays is presented in commercial brochures, and have then compiled their own versions using information collected from a wide range of sources. Work is already comparable with middle grade GCSE standards. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Year 11 students' results from completed and assessed modules are already in line with nationally expected performance for the completed course. This is very good achievement.

#### Teaching and learning

101. Teachers explain work well and, as a result, students know clearly what they have to do. Students are interested, behave very well and settle to work quickly, and so lessons progress briskly. Ample time for practical computer work and increasing opportunities to work independently as they get older is proving to be a very effective method of teaching. For example, students in Year 10 began a report on the uses, advantages and disadvantages of different types of computer printers, display devices or methods of storing data. Searching for information on the Internet, they quickly assembled draft writing and began to refine their reports, editing text directly on the word processor and transferring pictures directly into their document. Their learning was evident in the depth of understanding shown in the high standard of the work. Teachers support individual students very well. Short discussions, as teachers circulate round the room, are often enough to prevent difficulties developing and to keep learning moving on purposefully. This helps students with special educational needs to make very good progress.
102. Assessment is thorough so that students are very clear about how well they have done. In Years 9 to 11, students know their targets, and teachers use examination board guidance very effectively to help students improve work as they complete successive drafts of each task. Marking in Years 7 and 8 is good but gives less guidance on what needs to be done to improve work.



## Leadership and management

103. Subject leadership has a clear vision and drive for improvement. Teamwork is very strong. Teachers have prepared a wide range of high-quality teaching materials, and these are readily available to everyone on the school network. They provide a very good teaching framework, and support learning very well. Since the last inspection, the school has continued to build on its strengths in subject management, teaching and planning, and standards are higher.

## Information and communication technology across the curriculum

104. Students are very competent in ICT and use their skills well to support learning in other subjects. Most subjects make good, and often very good, use of ICT. For example, in mathematics, Year 10 students use graphic calculators to explore the behaviour of quadratic graphs. In some subjects, students have few planned opportunities to use ICT with teachers relying on students' own initiative, for example to search the Internet for information and to word process assignments.

## HUMANITIES

### Geography

Provision in geography is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

### Main strengths

- Almost all teaching is innovative and provides a very good variety of activities so that all students learn very well
- Students are very highly motivated to achieve because they are very interested in their work and want to learn more
- There is a clear understanding of the way students learn best and how they can be helped to achieve increasingly high standards
- The curriculum is planned well to ensure that students can use real situations to help them understand more complex ideas

### Commentary

#### Examination results

105. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were well above those reported nationally in 2003. GCSE results in 2004, although slightly lower than in 2003, were significantly above average.

#### Standards and achievement

106. Students' work at the end of Years 9 and Year 11 reflects previous results. Students are particularly well able to think for themselves, to discuss, and to describe and explain similarities and differences between places and environments around the world. Students' very good achievements are most notable in relation to their ability to produce sustained pieces of work, for example detailed enquiry work in Year 9 projects, and complex studies of differing environmental issues using first hand evidence and data in Year 11.

#### Teaching and learning

107. Generally, teachers plan a very varied range of activities in lessons so that students' differing interests and talents are used very well to promote their learning. Very good use of visual material enables students to understand other environments and cultures very well. For example, students remember the video clips and discussion when these experiences are used in later lessons. A very

strong feature of teaching is providing opportunities for students to develop their abilities to think for themselves. For example, in a Year 11 lesson about population migration from Mexico to California, the teacher worded questions in a thought provoking way to help students contribute extended answers. Students were encouraged to consider and select, independently, their approach to recording the lesson from a range of diagrammatic forms. In some classes, teachers provide students with the opportunity to use ICT to help them learn. For example, in a Year 8 lesson about Amazon rainforests, students used the Internet to research deforestation and possible solutions to the problems arising. In other lessons, the use of key words helped students to identify and understand important ideas. Very occasionally, students' achievement was not as high as it might have been because there was little opportunity for them to review their learning when this part of the lesson was rushed. In a very small number of instances, the highest-attaining students could have achieved even more if given additional challenge through different work.

### Leadership and management

108. The very clear vision of the way to teach geography, and the teamwork of teachers, have had a sustained influence over a period of time. This has been assisted by very good monitoring of students' achievements and teachers' performance. The curriculum provides a good blend of physical and human geography, and opportunities to understand environmental issues through the study of a varied range of different places around the world. Throughout, the use and interpretation of maps, data, photographs and other visual material help students to achieve particularly well in developing their skills, their ability to link areas of learning together and to be able to think for themselves. A very good and progressive programme of fieldwork enables students' use of first hand experiences. However, planning does not always give sufficient detail to ensure that all teachers use the most effective strategies. Good resources help students understand life in other parts of the world, but sometimes the opportunities to make full use of ICT are limited by a lack of equipment. Since the last inspection, standards have improved steadily and teaching has improved very well. The range of resources and the use of ICT have also improved well.

### History

Provision in history is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and understanding of what the National Curriculum and examination boards require
- Students learn by means of a variety of well chosen tasks which engage their interest and require them to think independently
- Students receive good quality written and oral feedback which helps them to improve their work
- Students and teachers get on well together and share high expectations of standards of work and behaviour
- There are too few opportunities to use ICT in lessons

### Commentary

#### Examination results

109. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, in 2004, were well above those reported nationally in 2003. GCSE results in 2004 were significantly above average.

## Standards and achievement

110. By Year 9, while the lower-attaining students can combine information from various sources, the higher-attaining students begin to cross reference sources for reliability. In Year 11, students can organise and deploy historical knowledge, producing sound analysis and explanation. Students make very good progress due to well taught conventions of writing and evaluation and achieve very well.

## Teaching and learning

111. The level of challenge students encounter in lessons helps them to learn and achieve very well. A Year 7 class realised the relative nature of values, from one civilization and period of history to another, as they considered evidence of the way of life in Ancient Rome. Discussion revealed a high level of thinking skills and helped all abilities to clarify their ideas. Teachers imaginatively use examples from popular culture to give students a memorable and accessible way into complex tasks. In a Year 8 lesson, the components of popular 'soap' operas were analysed and applied to the interplay of personality and leadership in the English Civil War. In a Year 10 lesson on the failure of the League of Nations, the teacher's knowledge of examination requirements was used to make the students check the accuracy of their understanding and to recall key issues in the form that would earn them maximum marks. All lessons start with students being told what they are expected to learn against which they can compare their own understanding at the end.

## Leadership and management

112. The leadership of the department provides good working relationships which have welded the teachers into a strong team dedicated to securing the highest possible standards and levels of achievement. The new Year 7 scheme of work, with its detailed lesson plans and provision for the support of the least and most able, is a model of effective planning. Teachers are determined to maximise the use of active learning methods and develop thinking skills. Peer review helps teachers to improve their own performance and the development plan reflects these priorities and makes provision for appropriate training. The department makes good use of the data on student progress to support individuals and to hone their practice. Text books are plentiful but there is a lack of ICT facilities readily available. The self-evaluative and forward looking nature of the department, working increasingly as a team, and the current developments in teaching and learning have brought about very good improvement since the last inspection.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

  

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE are significantly above average
- Well-qualified teachers work well together as a team to ensure high standards
- Good resources, especially in the area of ICT, are used well to enhance learning
- The attitudes of students are very good and help to create a positive learning ethos in all lessons

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

113. The results of teacher assessments, at the end of Year 9, in 2004 were well above those reported nationally in 2003. These results continued a rising trend. Students study two GCSE short courses in Years 10 and 11 and there are no national individual subject comparators available. However, with well over three-quarters of candidates gaining grades A\* to C in 2003 and 2004, results are significantly above average.

### **Standards and achievement**

114. In Years 7 to 9, students produce a range of good design ideas. They use tools and equipment with care and accuracy, and develop good evaluation skills. Students come to the school with very varied previous experience but broadly average standards. Standards in Year 9 are not as high as previous teacher assessment indicate. This is partly because it is early in the year, partly because teacher assessment is based upon a wider evidence base than available in the inspection and partly because the school procedure may not give the most accurate assessment of attainment related to National Curriculum criteria. To reach their standards in Year 9, students achieve well. In Years 10 and 11, students' design work is of a high standard and is often typified by original design ideas which show development of thinking skills and good evaluations of existing products. Many students in these years use ICT very confidently for their research and in the development of their solutions, including very effective use of computer-aided designing. As they develop increasing confidence in designing and making skills, all students are achieving very well.

### **Teaching and learning**

115. All lessons are planned well with teachers making very good use of their subject knowledge to ensure that students' skills and knowledge are developed in a carefully structured manner, leading to high standards. In Years 7 to 9, teachers give clear guidance on the use of tools and equipment, and students work with care and accuracy. In a Year 7 food technology lesson, students' understanding in citizenship was effectively developed, alongside their design and technology capability, through the batch production of pizzas. In all years, lesson planning sheets, where students record the learning objectives at the start of the lesson and their progress towards meeting them at the end, are used very effectively to promote learning. Teachers use assessment very effectively to support achievement. For example, in a Year 11 resistant materials lesson, the teacher discussed his assessment of their work with each student in turn, and gave them clear guidance as to what was required next and where any improvements were needed. A very good assessment system enables teachers to use this information from assessment to focus their planning of subsequent lessons. A thriving Young Engineers Club helps a group of very enthusiastic students to enhance their expertise in the subject in an informal but challenging atmosphere.

### **Leadership and management**

116. The leadership in the subject has developed an excellent team who work in a mutually supportive environment. Organisation and planning are very good. Self-review procedures are used effectively to identify where changes might improve standards. Teacher expertise is shared well with partner schools as a result of the technology college status. Formal monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department is effective in maintaining high standards. Plans are well advanced to introduce a different assessment system, in Years 7 to 9, with the intention of making it more accurately related to National Curriculum levels. Since the last inspection, the subjects' strong provision has been maintained. Standards by the end of Year 9 have risen, and the good results at the end of Year 11 have been maintained. Although the attainment of girls is still above that of boys, the gap has been reduced to less than that nationally because boys' achievement has improved. The provision of resources for computer control, and the range of software for computer-aided design is much improved.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

### Art and design

Provision in art and design is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above expectation	Very high
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Excellent	
Management	Excellent	
Progress since the last inspection	Very good	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Innovative approaches to learning, within the teaching, lead to very good achievement
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- Leadership is reflective and purposeful and there is excellent teamwork
- Assessment strategies contribute very effectively to students' skills for independent learning
- The limited access to computers places some restrictions on students' achievements

### Commentary

#### Examination results

117. The results of teacher assessments, at the end of Year 9 in 2004, were well above those reported nationally in 2003. GCSE results, in 2003 and 2004, were significantly above average with notable numbers of students achieving the highest A\* grade.

#### Standards and achievement

118. Through practical work and research tasks, students' acquire a wide repertoire of skills. By the end of Year 9 most are working at levels well beyond national expectations. Significant numbers demonstrate well-above average levels of literacy. Written work shows a deepening understanding of the contextual factors that influence art and artists' work. For example, students' written research, about Picasso's *Guernica*, showed very thoughtful responses to the teacher's questions and prompts. In response to Munch's painting, *The Scream*, a boy's artwork used the familiar image in a contemporary setting, showing the fall of the twin towers as the background to fleeing, screaming people. Boys' attainment is, overall, lower than the girls' but there has been some recent improvement. The gap is slowly narrowing and more boys are opting to take the subject in Year 10.
119. By Year 11, students are highly-skilled, independent learners, able to work confidently to improve and modify their work. In a mock examination, undertaken during the inspection week, these skills were excellently demonstrated and standards were very high indeed. Students enjoy the subject and their excellent attitudes make a positive contribution to their achievement.

#### Teaching and Learning

120. Teachers are very highly skilled and have a thorough understanding of assessment strategies and how their use informs learning. Expectations of behaviour and work-rate are very high, and time spent in lessons and working at home is used very effectively. Improvements have been introduced that give students access to digital cameras and computer programs, the latter for research and also to prepare presentations. There are, however, very limited opportunities for students to extend and refine these skills because there is neither sufficient hardware, nor appropriate space to install more computers. Therefore, students rarely have the opportunity to fulfil their potential to use computers imaginatively and creatively within the context of the subject, and to get the same high quality feedback that is available when they work with other materials and media. Very effective teacher assessments enable students to review and refine their decision-making as they work.

## Leadership and Management

121. Leadership is forward looking and there is excellent teamwork and regular professional dialogue about the impact of teaching on students' learning and achievements. The subject makes an excellent contribution to the school ethos through students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## Music

Provision in music is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning enables students to achieve very well by the end of Year 11
- Regular opportunities are given in lessons for students to reflect on their learning
- The extra-curricular opportunities provided for students to enhance their experience and enjoyment of music are outstanding
- Students enjoy music lessons and display very good attitudes

## Commentary

### Examination results

122. Results of teacher assessments, at the end of Year 9 in 2004, were lower than those in 2003. In 2003, they were well above those reported nationally. GCSE results in 2004 were lower than in 2003. Those in 2003 were significantly above the national average while those in 2004 were in line with the national average. The reason for this dip in standards was partly due to the cohort, and partly because of temporary staffing changes.

### Standards and achievement

123. Students enter the school with average attainment in music, and they achieve very well during their time in the school. Students in all years are encouraged to improve their capabilities in composing and performing. Overall, standards achieved in these skills are high, with songs and solo instrumental pieces being amongst the performances recorded by students in Year 11. For example, Year 8 students were given the task of creating a second melody part exactly a major third higher than an original melody. All students fulfilled the task and were able to notate correctly their resultant two-part composition. Higher-attaining students were successful in composing both the original and the new melody. All students achieved very well in this lesson. Students with special educational needs achieve very well because the teachers offer them tasks which are well matched to their needs and give very effective support during lessons. Higher-attaining students are generally well catered for in music lessons and so achieve very well.

### Teaching and learning

124. Teachers display a very deep knowledge of their subject and, along with their enthusiasm and excellent practical skills, are able to motivate students to try their best. The structure of lessons and the sharing of clear learning objectives, an improvement since the last inspection, enable students to understand what it is they will be learning. Very good questioning and explanations by teachers develop students' knowledge and understanding. The regular use of ICT, in lessons within Years 7 to 9, gives further opportunities to develop compositional skills, and is an improvement since the last inspection. The constant encouragement to use correct musical terminology and the opportunities given in every lesson for students to assess how much they have learnt are strong features of all teaching. The latter helps teachers to know what needs to be taught next and the students to be

fully involved in recognising and improving their own rate of progress. Students' very good attitudes, and the positive relationships between staff and students which exist within the subject, combine to create a very effective learning environment in which students enjoy their music and achieve very well. On occasion, an opportunity is missed for resolving individual student's misconceptions or independent learning is restricted by teachers who intervene in answers too early.

### Leadership and management

125. The teachers in the department have complementary skills and work extremely well as a team. Their focus is on the achievement of all students and they are totally committed to making music accessible to all. The analysis of examination results leads to developmental action. Assessment is linked well to National Curriculum levels and students' progress is closely monitored. Targets set following regular assessments are very effective in helping to raise achievement because students know the levels at which they are working and what they have to do to improve their standards further. Accommodation is good and musical resources are very good, although more computers are needed for a whole class to access at once. The music staff have a strong interest in the performing arts and the provision of extra-curricular activities is excellent. Together with some of the peripatetic instrumental staff, they organise eighteen activities each week. The standards achieved in these activities are very high and many students participate. Approximately 300 students take the opportunity of learning a musical instrument.

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very Good
Leadership	Very Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since the last inspection	Good	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and students' very good attitudes to learning have a positive impact on achievement
- The curriculum is offering a good experience for students during lessons and through the extra curricular provision
- There are good procedures for assessment in Key Stage 4 but assessment at Key Stage 3 does not fully assess the National Curriculum

### Commentary

#### Examination results

126. The results of teacher assessment, at the end of Year 9 in 2004, were similar to those in 2003. In 2003, they were well above those reported nationally. GCSE results in 2004 were similar to those in 2003 and were significantly above the national average.

#### Standards and achievement

127. Overall, students attainment on entry is average. By Year 9, students are able to perform a straddle vault with good tension and understand how to support each other safely in gymnastics. They work well in groups and are able to analyse and evaluate ways to improve gymnastic movements. In football, students control the ball effectively, pass with precision, and link with an attacker to perform a 1-2 combination. In netball, students combine skills of space awareness with the use of quick feet and use the dodge as a good tactic. They understand how a long square pass in hockey can be used as a good tactic, during a game, to change the point of attack. Students have very good attitudes to learning. They come prepared for lessons, are very well behaved and achieve well.

128. Students make very good progress in GCSE lessons. They understand the importance of tactics in badminton and are able to perform a drop shot to good effect. In theory lessons, students know about Somatotypes and how to construct a training programme to meet different individual requirements. They have a very good understanding of the use and mis-use of drugs in sport, and about the psychological aspects affecting sporting success. In core physical education, standards are well above average where, for example, students are able to perform a trampoline sequence and understand the technical elements of a front drop. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

### Teaching and learning

129. Lessons are carefully planned with a range of tasks which are well-matched to all students' needs. Teachers ensure that planned learning outcomes are met through using carefully planned questions to check on learning. Students are continually expected to think about what they are doing and learning. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. Praise and encouragement are features of a teaching style which creates a learning atmosphere in which students gain in confidence and are challenged to improve. This was evident, for example, in trampolining where students increased the height off the bed to perform skilful moves, and in football where students attempted advanced ball control techniques. Very good use of resources ensures that lessons are interesting and teaching maintains students' motivation. The use of GCSE criteria for assessment in Years 10 and 11 core physical education is effective in promoting achievement.

### Leadership and management

130. Leadership is purposeful and provides clear direction for future development. All staff are appropriately qualified and have clearly defined responsibilities. Performance management and monitoring are an integral feature of the department. Departmental documentation is very good. Staff are well motivated, committed to improvement and hard working. This has a good impact on learning. The curriculum programme is well planned and includes a very good range of activities. School visits are used to assess outdoor and adventurous activity. However, assessment in Years 7 to 9 does not fully cover all strands of the National Curriculum. The extensive extra-curricular programme provides students with opportunities to progress at all levels of sport. Indoor facilities are very good. Since the last inspection, standards have improved and there is better match between planned work and individual students' needs.

## BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

### Engineering

Provision in engineering is very good.

	Year 11
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	This is a new course

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students were very successful in the first examinations taken in this new subject
- Students' skills and knowledge are at a high level and are better than their depth of understanding
- Teaching has many strengths but teachers are not easily able to gauge students' grasp of new work because learning outcomes are not clearly specified



## Commentary

### Examination results

131. Students on this new double award course were examined for the first time in 2004. All students gained a pass with 78 per cent gaining the top, A\* and A, grades. These results were significantly above average.

### Standards and achievement

132. Current standards in Year 11 reflect the level of the previous results. Some have quite outstanding skills, for example in designing with purpose and target user in mind, without being constrained by current designs, in producing professional results with the computer-aided design software, and in working with metal from engineering drawings. Most have very good relevant knowledge, for example of the properties of different materials, the stages of different processes, the use of different electronic components, and the Internet. Their understanding of how to integrate all their skills with their knowledge and with a thorough grasp of science, and of how technologists work is generally good.
133. All students have the opportunity to choose this new option and so, while overall standards on entry are above average, students have a range of previous design and technology and ICT experience and standards. All students are all very well motivated and keen to learn and explore. As a result, they are achieving very well.

### Teaching and learning

134. Teaching shows many excellent features. Teachers' command of the subject, its language and its principles, results in well-planned lessons and clear explanations. Teachers have high expectations for what students can achieve and continually challenge them to pass new frontiers in their learning. Teachers ensure that lessons move at a brisk pace even when students are working individually on computers. Students concentrate very well, are focussed on their learning and work hard so that they learn very well. Students work well co-operating with each other but have not yet developed the skill of collaborative working. They make rapid progress in developing their skills and knowledge. Lesson planning does not routinely identify specific learning outcomes. As a result, teachers are not easily able to assess students' grasp of new material so as to modify teaching immediately, if necessary. Teachers do not use modern technology in lessons as well as they might to support learning, such as using digital video for common demonstrations of small machine parts, or projected presentations to illustrate processes.

### Leadership and management

135. The subject leader works very closely with the head of the design and technology faculty, and both leadership of the engineering staff and students, and management of the engineering resources and systems, are very good. Accommodation and resources for the course are very good and support learning. Computers are readily accessible and used well.

## PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

### Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Insufficient evidence
Achievement	Good	Insufficient evidence
Teaching and learning	Good	Insufficient evidence
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Good	
Progress since the last inspection	This is a new course	

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers manage and plan citizenship activities well in PSHE and in the designated lessons across the curriculum
- Standards of attainment are above average by the end of Year 9
- The school council and the sixth form forum offer good opportunities to experience democracy in action
- Students are not always aware when they are experiencing aspects of citizenship

### **Commentary**

136. Citizenship is not taught as a separate subject but coverage of the required content is achieved through the PSHE lessons, subjects across the curriculum and by students' experience in other school activities.

### **Results and examinations**

137. Teacher assessment, at the end of Year 9, reports attainment which is above nationally expected levels for students of this age. There are no GCSE examinations.

### **Standards and achievement**

138. In Year 9, students show an above-average knowledge of issues about the developing world and the purposes of community-based, national and international charities. Their understanding of political issues is average. Most students, in Year 11, show good ability to understand and reflect upon issues, and take a positive part in discussions. They show good understanding of the diverse religious and ethnic groups in the UK. They are well prepared for adult life through lessons in PSHE, some other subjects and out of school activities. In Years 10 and 11, careers preparation and work experience help students reflect on the school's core values of responsibility, truth, justice, faith and compassion. Students achieve well in citizenship through Years 7 to 9 and, when opportunities are provided, in later years. Both girls and boys show very good attitudes to learning, work productively, and show considerable respect for each others' points of view.

### **Teaching and learning**

139. Good planning for citizenship, within the designated subject lessons, stimulates students with issues related to everyday life, although in some lessons they were not aware that citizenship issues were being addressed. Teaching was at least good in PSHE lessons in Years 7 to 9. In a very good Year 8 lesson, students took on roles within a community threatened by vandalism, and demonstrated their above-average skills in arguing a case, and interrogating others assertively.

### **Leadership and management**

140. Leadership has ensured that citizenship is part of the teaching programme within the school, that it features in subject and lesson planning, that teachers are being well trained and that assessment and reporting requirements are met. Students benefit from a well-managed teaching programme in PSHE and in some selected lessons in other subjects, such as English and history. Students in each year can represent their peers on the school council or the sixth form forum. Many sixth form students support younger students with reading and club activities and contribute to the APAUSE sex education teaching programme. Parents appreciate the way students gain maturity through extensive community and sports activities.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	21	95.2	80.1	42.9	23.7	39.5	29.9
Biology	21	85.7	65.2	19.0	11.1	29.5	20.6
Chemistry	16	68.8	72.7	25.0	13.9	23.8	24.1
Drama	2	50.0	86.5	0.0	19.6	15.0	30.6
Economics	40	70.0	73.6	15.0	20.1	24.3	26.4
English/English language	15	93.3	82.9	20.0	17.5	29.3	28.7
English literature	7	100.0	85.9	14.3	19.1	30.0	30.2
French	3	66.7	78.2	0.0	18.9	16.7	27.6
Design and technology	6	100.	74.9	50.0	15.1	41.7	25.3
General studies	17	82.4	73.9	23.5	17.8	25.3	25.7
Geography	13	84.6	74.3	38.5	19.8	36.9	26.5
German	14	100.0	81.5	28.6	19.3	37.9	28.9
History	16	87.5	80.7	18.8	19.5	32.5	28.6
Mathematics	15	86.7	61.9	0.0	17.1	24.7	22.1
Music	3	66.7	86.5	33.3	21.4	26.7	30.7
Other languages	1	0.0	82.6	0.0	42.0	0.0	36.2
Other sciences	7	85.7	71.4	42.9	15.8	34.3	24.3
Other social studies	48	72.9	69.7	25.0	16.7	72.9	69.7
Physics	7	100.0	68.6	57.1	14.4	47.1	22.7
Religious education	7	85.7	80.2	14.3	22.6	27.1	29.8
Sociology	1	0.0	71.8	0.0	18.4	0.0	25.4
Sports/PE studies	12	66.7	73.2	0.0	11.4	17.5	23.1

### *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	17	100.0	98.6	52.9	50.2	85.9	87.5
Biology	25	100.0	96.4	44.0	39.2	81.6	78.6
Chemistry	6	100.0	97.6	100.0	49.0	116.7	84.9
Drama	12	100.0	99.5	58.3	40.1	90.	83.6
Economics	58	100.0	98.9	65.5	52.0	92.4	88.3
English/English language	12	100.0	99.4	58.3	36.3	95.0	80.9
English literature	39	100.0	99.5	61.5	46.5	92.3	86.5

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
French	11	100.0	98.8	45.5	51.5	85.5	87.6
Design and technology	17	100.0	97.8	41.2	35.0	85.9	77.9
General studies	88	96.6	94.7	29.5	31.0	73.4	73.1
Geography	21	100.0	98.7	85.7	44.5	105.7	84.0
German	9	100.0	98.4	66.7	47.9	93.3	84.8
History	46	100.0	99.0	37.0	44.6	82.2	84.6
Mathematics	24	95.8	96.7	70.8	55.6	90.8	88.8
Music	4	100.0	98.8	100.0	38.9	110.0	81.1
Other languages	1	100.0	96.9	100.0	64.5	120.0	93.8
Other sciences	35	100.0	97.3	68.6	41.5	98.9	80.3
Other social studies	64	100.0	97.4	21.9	42.7	75.6	81.8
Physics	9	100.0	96.7	22.2	44.6	77.8	81.7
Religious education	7	100.0	98.8	0.0	46.7	54.3	85.6
Sports/PE studies	9	100.0	98.0	55.6	30.9	82.2	75.2
Business	32	100.0	65.0	51.6	14.6	90.9	60.1
Health & social care	18	100.0	67.7	45.7	14.5	82.9	63.5
Science	2	100.0	44.8	0.0	3.7	50.0	58.5
Information technology VQ	14	100.0	77.9	42.9	23.4	90.0	64.9
Travel and tourism	8	87.5	71.8	0.0	14.5	62.5	62.2

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus for the inspection in this curriculum area was A-level English literature, French and German. The separate combined course in A-level English language and literature was sampled.

The school is planning to replace the combined course from September 2005. In the A-level examinations in 2003, results were well above the national average, as they had been the previous year. Results in 2004 were similar to 2003. In the lesson observed, students made excellent progress in analysing the principles of structured writing because of the pace and rigour of the teaching. Students enjoy the scope that the subject offers them to develop their own opinions, but some find the literature content of the course too high. The views of students played a significant part in the decision to replace this course.

### English

Provision in English literature is very good.

	Year 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

## **Main strengths**

- Teaching is academically demanding
- Students respond with maturity to a high degree of involvement in lessons

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

141. Overall results at A-level in 2003 were above average, with female results being well above average, while male results were above average. More female students than male followed the course. In 2004, the results were similar to those in 2003.

### **Standards and achievement**

142. By the time students reach Year 13, they are able to write lengthy, accurate and well-argued essays that display a mature ability to sustain a line of reasoning and support assertion with well-researched evidence. For example, Year 13 students wrote perceptive essays comparing Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby* with Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land*. This challenging task led them to examine issues of appearance and reality and to link literary themes with their social and cultural contexts.
143. Students' discussion skills are of a high order. In a very good Year 12 lesson, groups of students, some of whom had read *King Lear* and some of whom had read *Much Ado about Nothing*, were required to analyse common themes from the two plays. Students thus had the responsibility of explaining to others the complexities of each play so that valid conclusions could be drawn and supported by evidence. The high level of students' written and oral work is underpinned by the fact that they are accustomed to using a sophisticated technical vocabulary.

### **Teaching and learning**

144. Because teachers know their subject very well, lessons are wide ranging, enabling students to appreciate the texts being studied in their wider contexts. For example, Year 13 students reading literature of the First World War conveyed an understanding of military and political as well as literary issues. Lessons have a sharp focus that is made explicit to students and are conducted at a brisk pace. Work is marked in detail, with clear guidance on how standards can be improved.
145. Group discussion work is a strong feature of the lessons. Students enjoy this aspect of the course, welcoming the opportunity to develop and justify their own ideas. The high level of student involvement in lessons and the sense of partnership with teachers lead to excellent relationships in the classrooms. Challenging tasks and high expectations lead to very good achievement and the current high standards.

### **Leadership and management**

146. The leadership of the subject creates a very strong sense of direction, with clear priorities focused on improvement and very good organisation. Since the last report, high standards have been consolidated and there has been good overall improvement.

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

147. Across the curriculum, students display standards of literacy that are well above average. There is, however, some variation in the provision that different subjects make for the development of students' skills in this respect. In psychology, for example, there are very well-structured opportunities for students to develop discussion skills and to write at length. In languages and the humanities, there are notable strengths in students' linguistic competence. In ICT, the standard of students' writing and their accurate use of specialist terminology make a significant contribution to high levels of achievement. In some other subjects, students do not have sufficient opportunities to undertake extended writing tasks.

## French

Provision in French is good.

	Year 13
Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good subject knowledge and very good linguistic skills of teachers raise standards
- The use of up-to-date authentic texts and materials from the Internet motivate students to achieve well
- Standards in listening, speaking and reading are higher than in writing

### Commentary

#### Examination results

148. The results at A-level in 2003 were in line with the national average. Results in 2004 improved considerably. All students gained A or B grades.

#### Standards and achievement

149. In lessons in both Year 12 and Year 13, students have very well-developed listening skills. They cope very well with lessons conducted at normal speed in French on topics such as the introduction of the euro, environmental issues and tourism. Most students can read authentic texts on a wide range of topics with the use of dictionaries. They are very good at understanding the gist and picking out key details. The pronunciation and intonation of most students is of high quality. Year 12 students have successfully bridged the gap between GCSE and AS level and can express personal opinions on topics, such as eating habits in France and tourism. The Year 13 students engaged in a very successful debate on the introduction of the euro in France. They all communicated their ideas very successfully with some speaking confidently and fluently. Some higher- and average-attaining students in Year 12 write extended texts on the AS topics. They express their ideas coherently, but make basic spelling mistakes and errors in grammar. Year 13 students write essays on an impressive range of A-level topics from drug taking to women's rights. They express their ideas very well, but again their writing is marred by a high degree of error. Students make good progress from Year 12 to Year 13, especially in listening and speaking. Progress in writing is more limited.

#### Teaching and learning

150. Teachers are very well qualified and experienced, and speak French fluently. The effective use of French in most lessons, and the work with small groups with the French assistant, result in above average standards in listening and speaking. Teachers support and monitor individuals very well, which enables all students to participate very well in lessons and achieve their potential. Teachers have very good questioning techniques that ensure the development of good quality oral work. As a result, students are highly motivated and very confident. Students prepare very well, so that they can participate fully in lessons. Teachers make effective use of up-to-date resources, including topical materials from the Internet, that help to relate the lessons to the real world. However, limited access to computers restricts what teachers and students can do with ICT.

#### Leadership and management

151. There is very good collaboration between the teachers and they work very well together to produce and update the scheme of work. Teaching and students' progress are very well monitored. Accommodation and learning resources are good. The work of the French assistant is very well integrated into the curriculum. Assessment is very good and contributes much to raising standards.

The high standards at the time of the last inspection have been maintained, and teaching and learning have improved.

### German

Provision in German is good.

	Year 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Insufficient evidence

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve high standards in listening and reading skills
- Very good relationships foster positive student attitudes towards German
- The teaching enables students to acquire skills systematically
- There are few enrichment opportunities to broaden students' experience in using the language

### Commentary

#### Examination results

152. A-level results in 2003 were above average. Six of the nine candidates gained grade B, and the remainder C. In 2004, the three students gained A or B grades. There was little difference in the performance of males and females. Retention rates from AS to A2 are average.

#### Standards and achievement

153. Attainment on entry to the A-level courses is well above average. Standards in the present Year 13 are well above average as all four students are on target to achieve grades A or B. Their listening and reading skills are superior at this stage of the year. They are very well able to grasp the general content and much of the gist of passages of complex German. The input of native speakers, and the consistent use of German in the classroom, support learning in this skill. As a result, students make good progress generally and grow in confidence as they are trained to infer meaning for themselves. Recent staffing difficulties have resulted in some discontinuity in the development of their skills in speaking and writing, by reducing opportunities to prepare extended tasks. Standards in the larger Year 12 group are above average. The emerging skills of the higher-attaining students point to higher results in future.

#### Teaching and learning

154. A major strength in teaching is that German is consistently used to direct students' learning. Students' thinking skills are well-developed as they have opportunities in all lessons to acquire or revise vocabulary and grammar in meaningful contexts. The best lessons actively engage students through brainstorming and effective pair-work, and build on students' pre-lesson preparation. In this way, students' efforts are celebrated and valued. Students are very clear of the demands made on them and respond appropriately. They work hard in lessons, concentrating fully and taking responsibility for their own learning through instant note-taking. They work well with, and support, each other in formulating ideas and opinions. The very good relationships students enjoy with teachers, founded on the encouragement and practical advice they receive, underpins their achievement. When teaching is less effective, this is largely because resources and strategies have not been fully thought through to support the lower-attaining or more inhibited students. Most of the students have not been to Germany in the recent past and there is no systematic programme to widen their language experiences.

## Leadership and management

155. The current arrangements for subject leadership support the present good level of provision but do not provide the specialist focus for future significant development of the subject at this level. Colleagues work very hard to ensure that essential management tasks are effectively carried out. There are 13 students currently studying German in the sixth form - a reasonable number, especially as there is another successful foreign language course on offer.

## MATHEMATICS

The focus of the inspection was on the A-level mathematics course. The further mathematics course was sampled. In the lessons observed standards were very high. The teacher's subject knowledge was very good and this was used very well in a small group. Students' attitudes were very good and they displayed a thirst for knowledge.

Provision in mathematics is very good.

	Year 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths

- Teachers use their expert subject and examination knowledge to teach very effectively
- Very good teaching combined with very good student attitudes ensures very good learning
- Recent leadership emphasis on improvement has raised students' achievement

### Commentary

#### Examination results

156. Results in the A-level examinations in 2003 were above average, with two-thirds of candidates obtaining A and B grades. The number of female candidates in 2003 was very small, which is not typical for the school. Results in 2004 were similar, overall, although the proportion obtaining the top grades fell to one half.

#### Standards and achievement

157. Standards in lessons and in students' recorded work are higher than those reflected in recent examinations. Students in both years are now maintaining the well-above average standards which they have at entry to the sixth form and are achieving very well. They have a good knowledge of their target examination grades. Year 13 students taking statistics have well-above average understanding of the philosophy of hypothesis testing, which they apply very effectively to new situations. Very good progress was seen in a Year 12 lesson as the result of very good collaboration between students who were grouped into teams, competing to complete a practice examination paper.

#### Teaching and learning

158. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and structure them carefully, to ensure that students achieve. They convey their expert knowledge to students through the confident use of a range of very effective, and sometimes innovative, teaching and learning methods. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on partial fractions, the teacher involved students in a very well-constructed starter activity. This was followed by very good direct teaching, and then questioning of the interested and attentive group of students, who made very good learning gains. ICT is used well by teachers for demonstration and by students who, for example, use spreadsheets capably in statistics lessons. Students are very appreciative of their teachers' efforts and the constructiveness of their marking. All teaching seen during the inspection was good or very good.



## Leadership and management

159. Good leadership has ensured that appropriate priorities for improvement have been identified. Recent steps taken to improve results include dialogues with successful schools and the design, and interpretation of the results, of a student questionnaire on the student experience. Schemes of work still lack topic by topic advice on how to challenge the most able students, or to support those who have difficulties. Student versions of the syllabus have been devised so that students can share in tracking their own progress. A clear vision of how to raise achievement, through very high quality teaching, has been developed and effective management has ensured that this vision is shared amongst the teaching team and put into practice. The consequent rise in standards is good improvement.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

160. Students practise and extend their numeracy skills well in many subjects. For example, in biology they develop a range of statistical skills in their fieldwork, compute indices related to diversity and population size, and have a good understanding of scaling. In ICT, spreadsheets are used very effectively. In music, work on cadences benefits from students' good understanding of pattern. In French, students use percentages and charts, and carry out currency conversions. Overall, although there has not yet been a systematic consideration of the development of numeracy across the sixth form curriculum, students' competence is good.

## SCIENCE

Biology and chemistry were the focus of the inspection. Physics and geology are also taught in this curriculum area.

Results in physics, in 2003, were average and, in 2004, they have risen significantly. Geology was sampled. In a Year 13 lesson teaching and learning were very good and standards were well above average. The teacher demonstrated a clear understanding of the syllabus requirements and set a brisk pace throughout the lesson. Students confidently answered the frequently asked challenging questions and provided the teacher with good feedback which indicated very good achievement. Relationships were very good and students enjoyed the lesson.

## Biology

Provision in biology is good.

	Year 13
Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Improvement since the previous inspection	Satisfactory

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and explanations are clear and systematic
- Students enjoy the subject and feel they are making good progress
- The quality of the teaching, together with attitudes, leads to good achievement
- The range of teaching and learning approaches is too narrow, but is being increased
- There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching that leads to professional development feedback for teachers

## Commentary

### Examination Results

161. A-level results in 2003 were above average. Overall, results in 2004 were similar but with a higher proportion of students obtaining higher grades.

### Standards and achievement

162. Students in Year 13 have, for example, above average understanding of the resting potential of an axon, the mechanism of transmission of the action potential and the detailed workings of the loop of Henle in the kidney. Students make good progress and are achieving well.

### Teaching and learning

163. Teachers introduce concepts clearly and systematically, and reinforce these through activities such as practical work, answering past questions and summary diagrams. Modelling is used to explain concepts, for example when explaining statistical methods of estimating population size. The National Strategy for Science has started to have a positive impact in some lessons in terms of the variety of activity and the structure, rigour and pace of lessons. This approach is not yet fully or consistently implemented across the department, and teaching methods overall lack sufficient variety. Teachers use ICT well to support learning, for example flash animations showing the workings of rod cells in the eye. However, all teachers are not yet fully conversant with the use of the new interactive whiteboard or using it to its maximum effect. Difficulty in ready and immediate access to computers means that students make insufficient use of them to support their learning. Good assessment procedures ensure that students are regularly tested, receive feedback in terms of grade-related performance and are guided on how to improve.

### Leadership and management

164. New teaching strategies are being introduced, particularly in relation to the use of ICT. New mentoring arrangements have been put in place to supported students identified as underachieving. Independent work and problem-solving approaches have been under-represented in the curriculum but measures are being taken to increase these. New strategies are being put in place to share good practice, for example through peer observation and a science web-site.

### Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is good.

	Year 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results are consistently well above average
- The well-qualified team of teachers use their individual strengths to best effect
- Students share very good relationships with their teachers and have a very good attitude to learning
- Students are given insufficient opportunity to use and develop their ICT skills

### Commentary

#### Examination results

165. In 2003, the results of a small group of students were very high; that is in the top 5 per cent of schools. Results in 2004, of a much larger group, closely match the well-above average results of 2002. In each of these years, all students passed their examinations with over half gaining the top two grades.

#### Standards and achievement

166. Students enter the sixth form with attainment that is above the national average and they make good progress in both years, particularly in the second half of the course as examinations approach. Students are achieving well. Current standards in Year 13 are well above average. Students have a

good understanding, for example of organic molecular structure, and confidently identify oxidation states in complex molecules.

### Teaching and learning

167. Teachers and students share very good relationships and work in a cooperative atmosphere. This produces an effective learning environment. In the first term of Year 12, students experience a change in teaching styles from the more teacher-led styles in the main school, to ones which place greater emphasis on the independent learning needed for success in this modern applied chemistry course. For example, Year 12 students learn to link laboratory experiment with industrial processes when they identify copper ores found in rock samples and apply their knowledge to the principles of commercial extraction. Their satisfaction with the course, and the final outcomes, show that they overcome this hurdle effectively. The good teaching identifies what students already know and understand before advancing further. This develops good levels of confidence and ensures that students progress well as their knowledge increases. Resources are good and teachers use some aspects of ICT well to support their teaching but students' use of ICT is not sufficiently built into teaching programmes.

### Leadership and management

168. Leadership has ensured that the philosophy of the new course is understood and shared. Teachers work well as a team, and their complementary strengths are used to best effect for the students' benefit. They willingly provide additional lunch time support for those who need it. The department has not undertaken sufficient monitoring of teaching, so that best practice might be shared and professional development undertaken. The wealth of well analysed data from regular assessments has not been used effectively to identify weaker aspects of work in the subject. Both weaknesses have been identified and plans to remedy them are being developed. Since the previous inspection, a new course has been introduced and results have improved significantly.

### INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is very good.

	Year 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Excellent
Management	Excellent
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths

- Students are very successful in their examinations with well above average results
- Teaching focuses on the needs of individual students and prepares them very well for study at higher levels of education
- Students have mature attitudes that contribute very well to learning
- Excellent subject management contributes significantly to students' examination successes

### Commentary

#### Results

169. Examination success goes from strength to strength with steady improvement since the course was introduced. Results in 2003 were well above the national average. Results in 2004 were higher with more than two-thirds of students gaining A and B grade passes.

#### Standards and achievement

170. Current Year 13 students began the course with just above average GCSE results. Students are on course, once more, to gain very good results by the end of the school year. Work is challenging and makes great demands on students' skills of personal organisation. Students rise to these

challenges, work hard and achieve very well. In little more than half a term, Year 13 students have produced high quality multimedia presentations on topics as diverse as “drag” racing at the Santa Pod Raceway, a programme of dance tutorials and an introduction to women’s football. All are produced to high standards. They include video and sound and many are close to professional quality. Extensive accompanying documentation shows the detailed research, design, successive stages of development, testing and evaluation that have gone into the work.

### **Teaching and learning**

171. Teachers have prepared a comprehensive collection of high quality support materials for every unit of work, and a calendar of deadlines for every task. All documentation, including examination board guidance, is freely available to students on the school’s computer network. Once topics have been introduced, much of the responsibility to organise time and to keep up with the schedule passes to the students. They have mature attitudes. Students work conscientiously and most stick very well to course deadlines. They welcome the opportunities that independent learning gives them to manage their work alongside other commitments, and they appreciate how it helps them prepare for study in higher education.
172. Teachers support students very well. Very good assessment, against clear examination criteria, ensures that students know the standards they are attaining and frequent discussions keep them well informed about how to improve work in progress. As a result, students are in a good position to modify and refine work if necessary. Teachers are skilled at teaching advanced techniques at the time they arise naturally in the development of coursework, for example when developing spreadsheet stock control systems. As a result, teaching is very effective because students apply what they learn to systems that they themselves have planned and developed.

### **Leadership and management**

173. There is a strong, clear drive towards maintaining the highest possible standards. The school has successfully introduced new courses and standards are already well above average and rising. Teachers have devoted a lot of time to the preparation of the high quality resources that are available on the school network. These are a major factor in the very good teaching that students receive.

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

174. Students are very competent with ICT but opportunities to use it to support learning vary between subjects. Much is left to students to organise for themselves. At its best, students make very good use of ICT, for instance in technology where they use specialist programs very well to produce high quality graphic design work. However, in some subjects ICT is not planned into work and students use little more than basic word processing to present essays and assignments.

### **HUMANITIES**

Geography and philosophy were focus subjects in this curriculum area. History and politics were sampled.

In the history lesson, a variety of tasks were used to cater for different learning styles. The lesson built on previous work about men who might lead a Soviet state. The teacher used video and PowerPoint to help prepare student discussion groups to assess the relative power base of different leaders. The lesson involved students in evaluating theories, the sequencing of knowledge and synthesising. Students enjoyed the work, appreciated the level of advice from the teacher and achieved very well.

In a Year 12 politics lesson, students demonstrated good understanding of racism and its consequences due to well-planned teaching that helped students achieve well. Their understanding of the power of pressure groups was above average.

## Geography

Provision in geography is very good.

	Year 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths

- Teaching uses a wide range of styles to enable very good learning to take place
- Students enjoy their studies and relationships with staff are very strong
- Leadership is dynamic and concentrates on improving teaching and raising standards

### Commentary

#### Examination results

175. Results in 2003 were very high; in the top five per cent of schools, which was a significant improvement from the previous year. Results in 2004 were slightly higher.

#### Standards and achievement

176. Year 12 students have very good understanding of the processes affecting the formation of deltas and can identify major key features from aerial photographs. Students made very good progress in achieving their grades. In Year 13, students' answers show very good knowledge of the causes and consequences of weathering. Students make very good progress through their course and achieve very well.

#### Teaching and Learning

177. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and impart this well to their students. Students' very good attitudes and the strength of relationships generate a very good atmosphere which encourages learning. Students enjoy lessons and respond with enthusiasm. Group work and paired work are used effectively and, in the best of teaching, students take more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers use ICT very effectively in the planning, delivery and management of lessons, using laptops and the new interactive whiteboard technology. Good guidance is given for the use of the Internet to support research in homework assignments. Teaching pays attention to the importance of defining, understanding and remembering key geographical vocabulary. Teachers prepare students well for the examination system, integrating practice answers into study units. Students' work is marked promptly and very valuable oral and written feedback is given to assist them in improving their standards.

#### Leadership and Management

178. Leadership has provided a clear vision of what needs to be done to improve further. Geography teachers have taken a lead in developing effective teaching practice within the wider humanities faculty. Accommodation is good with appropriate and up-to-date learning resources. Opportunities for fieldwork and residential visits are well planned and carefully linked to units of study. Since the last inspection, teaching staff have been broadening the range of teaching styles and approaches, and standards have risen.

## Psychology

Provision in psychology is very good.

	Year 13
Standards	Above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Not applicable

### Main strengths

- Students learn and think independently because activities are varied in very well-planned lessons
- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge skilfully to promote learning and to stimulate and encourage students, leading to very good achievement
- Students benefit from an effective mixture of challenge and support in lessons, and from helpful marking of their written assignments
- Leadership and management ensure rising standards through improving lesson planning and checks on students' progress

### Commentary

#### Examination results

179. Results, in 2003, matched the national average but were lower than the previous year. Results in 2004 were similar. The subject was not reported upon at the time of the previous inspection.

#### Standards and achievement

180. In Year 12, students grasp the theoretical bases of theories of memory very well, and know how to apply them in well-set practical activities. Here, they learn securely how to carry out simple experiments, before gathering and laying out their findings with thought and clarity. They summarise key studies, and explain their significance accurately and logically. At the same time, they understand the ethical and methodological validity of famous studies, and subject them to robust interrogation. This follows very good teacher encouragement to share ideas in discussion, make succinct summaries, debate the value of published studies, and test out knowledge at regular intervals. By Year 13, students apply theory and interpret their own experiences very well. Students achieve very well, because they acquire new ideas rapidly in both years and engage well in experiments.

#### Teaching and learning

181. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to brief and explain new ideas to students very well. They consistently prompt and question students helpfully as they work. Here, as with the marking of written assignments, students receive the right mixture of challenge and support. Teachers involve students in a well-planned series of practical activities, very well focussed to bring to life their understanding of difficult ideas, as well as to make them think critically and independently. For example, Year 13 students, very well motivated by a group problem solving exercise, defined contrasting theories of dreaming with great confidence. In response to careful prompting by the teacher, they understood well the differences between neurobiological and psychological explanations of dreaming and associated mental processes. Lessons consist of varied and demanding activities, well illustrated with computer-projected presentations and helpful printed material. As students make presentations about their findings, they learn well from each other when working in teams, and bring very good attitudes to their individual study. In all the lessons seen, the sense of enthusiasm, eagerness and good humour, shared between students and teachers, underpinned a very good and sustained work rate.

## Leadership and management

182. Leadership has resulted in improved lesson planning and better checking of students' progress so as to give additional support to those in difficulty. The department has successfully introduced new ways to keep students interested and consolidate their understanding and to prevent a dip in standards as student progress between their first and second year of study. Standards are rising as a result.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

### Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is very good.

	Year 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Insufficient evidence

### Main strengths

- Examination results are well above average
- Good professional relationships amongst the knowledgeable and experienced teachers creates effective teaching teams and this enhances the learning of the students
- Students' very good attitudes and hard work help to create a positive learning ethos
- The resources, especially for ICT, are used very effectively to support and enhance learning

### Commentary

#### Examination results

183. In 2003, results were above average with male students performing better than female. Overall results were similar to those in 2002, when female students performed better than male. Results in 2004 were an improvement on those in 2003.

#### Standards and achievement

184. Students in both Years 12 and 13 have developed good planning and research skills and are able to identify strategies which they can use to make good progress with their course work. This is particularly evident in Year 12 where the demands of the case study are substantially different from GCSE courses. The use of ICT as a research and recording tool is very good. Students who start the course in Year 12 have usually gained very good results at GCSE. Progress which they make at the start of Year 12 is slow for some students because they have difficulty in understanding the demands of the case study. However, once they have grasped the concepts involved, progress is more rapid. In Year 13, students demonstrate high levels of graphic skills when designing and produce a wide range of design ideas. In Year 13 progress is very good, especially with design work, where students use the skills they have gained to produce original ideas intended to solve real life design needs. They make very effective use of computer-aided design software to develop their ideas.

#### Teaching and learning

185. The examination results are the outcome of very effective teaching over time. A strong feature of teaching in the sixth form is the formation of teams of teachers who take responsibility for different aspects of the course for each group of students. This strategy is very effective and gives students access to a wide range of expertise. Teachers frequently work in the role of a facilitator of learning, encouraging and supporting students to develop as independent learners. The type and range of work throughout the course is effective in developing students' thinking skills. A good system of mentoring of students has been established over several years. Students appreciate the good

mentoring system that has been developed, speaking highly of it and the support which they receive from teachers. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, students were given very clear guidance on how to progress with their case studies which was effective in helping them to proceed with the task. Students in both years make very good use of ICT to carry out research and to present their work. The department's study room is effectively used by them as they work productively during their own time.

### **Leadership and management**

186. The organisation of design and technology in the sixth form is very effective. The very good planning ensures that maximum use is made of the resources available. The very good cooperation and communication between the teachers, making good use of links with the examination board, ensures that all have detailed knowledge of the demands of the course, and can provide very sound advice to the students.

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

Art and design and theatre studies were focus subjects in this area. Music was sampled.

Too few students were examined in music for statistical comparisons to be made. However, all candidates gained grades A or B in 2003. Results in 2004 were lower. In the Year 13 lesson, achievement was very good because of effective planning by the teacher. Students were given tasks relevant to their progress through the area of study and matched to their individual needs. Students worked hard on their harmonic progressions and discussed their solutions confidently. Relationships were very positive and standards were well above average.

### **Art and design**

Provision in art and design is very good.

	Year 13
Standards	Above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Detailed records and assessments of students' work underpin the very effective communications
- Students manage their time well and are very capable independent learners
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory and offers insufficient studio space for students to use it outside of lessons
- There are too few planned opportunities for students to talk about their own and others' work

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

187. Results in 2002 and 2003 were similar to the national average. Results in 2004 were similar. In recent years, over half the candidates have gained A or B grades. Each year a few students attain the lower grades but, more recently, these numbers have declined.

#### **Standards and achievement**

188. Preparatory and 'final' pieces of work show maturity and an advanced ability to make connections between the work of artists and students' own work. Many students visit exhibitions and local studios to study at first hand particular artists, their work and techniques. The highest-attaining students achieve excellently. Sketchbooks and journals contain very good progression as students' ideas and thought processes develop. However, not all students speak as confidently and authoritatively as they write about their own and others' work. The majority of students in current Year 12 classes began the course having attained well-above average GCSE results and are



achieving very well. A few students achieve less well because they do not keep pace with the work or have gaps in their attendance.

189. All students are affected by the cramped accommodation. There is no designated space where students can work outside of lessons, so access to specialist resources and equipment is limiting overall achievement. Students' competence in the use of computers is broadly average. There are some opportunities for extending research skills but few opportunities for manipulating images.

### Teaching and learning

190. Teachers are very highly skilled and have a thorough understanding of assessment strategies and how these inform their own planning and students' learning. Teachers' written assessments, one-to-one, and group feedback sessions enable students to review and refine their decision-making and to test out their ideas with their teachers. As a consequence, very good use is made of lesson time and the time devoted to homework, because students know what the course requirements are and what they need to do to improve. Teachers' expectations of behaviour and work-rate are very high. Improvements have been made to the breadth of the curriculum by introducing aspects of digital media. Computer programs are used to teach research skills and to prepare presentations. For the most part this work is undertaken as a whole class, outside the department. Art rooms are not equipped with enough computers to allow students the chance to extend and refine these skills, in ways that would be open to them if they chose to develop printmaking techniques or sculpture.

### Leadership and management

191. Leadership is forward-looking and there is excellent teamwork and regular professional dialogue about the impact of teaching on students' learning and achievements. This has resulted in improvements to the curriculum and in particular to the strategies for monitoring and assessing students' work and progress. The subject makes an excellent contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are regular visits to places of interest and galleries to support students' artwork and widen their experience of arts events in the community. Very good developments have taken place to keep students and parents better informed and involved with the subject requirements. The resource materials and exemplar materials on the school web site are a very good example of this.

### Theatre studies

Provision in theatre studies is satisfactory.

	Year 13
Standards	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Improvement since the previous inspection	Not applicable

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to give students a thorough grounding in the historical and theoretical background to drama
- Teaching lacks the focus to raise practical acting skills to their optimum levels
- Satisfactory achievement is founded on a steady rate of challenge in lessons
- Sound guidance on written work is encouraging but is not clear enough about what students need to do in order to improve

### Commentary

#### Examination results

192. Results in 2003 were above average, both overall and for the proportion gaining higher A or B grades. They sustained the level of the previous year. Results in 2004 fell significantly. The subject was not reported upon at this level by the previous inspection.

### **Standards and achievement**

193. In Year 12, students understand well the challenges of staging ancient Greek tragedy and go on to apply this adeptly to problems surrounding contemporary staging of the classics. Students use computers well, both to extract relevant information from the Internet and to lay out their own thinking logically. In Year 13, students understand clearly how to bring play scripts to life in performance. For example, one group studying a play text for the first time, understood how to examine dialogue in detail, utilising stage directions, knowledge of movement conventions, vocal projection, and suggestions about costume, to plan a theatrical presentation. They comprehend and explain well the relationship between key characters in plays such as Sheridan's *The Rivals*. Their practical acting skills lack a range of expression and development because teaching does not focus strongly enough on relevant styles of movement and vocal technique. Frequently, students understand what is required in theory, but are not given a high enough level of guidance to put it into practice. Boys' and girls' standards are similar. Achievement is sound because teachers make sure that students benefit from activities with a steady level of challenge, and structure acting exercises to build their understanding of character and action.

### **Teaching and learning**

194. Teachers use good subject knowledge to brief students and explain to them the strengths in their written work. In class, students benefit from a very thorough grounding in the historical and social background to drama. Students develop a satisfactory level of independent learning through teacher prompting and teaching strategies involving collaborative group work. Guidance given to individuals on written assignments is encouraging and praises their strengths. However, it is not detailed enough to help them to recognise how well they are doing and how to move to the next stage of learning.

### **Leadership and management**

195. Students' experiences have been extended well by theatre trips and visits from professional companies. Successful, initial efforts have been made to improve the teaching focus on areas where student achievement is weaker.

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

There were no focus subjects in this area. AVCE Travel and Tourism was sampled.

Travel and tourism examination results were average in 2003. Results in 2004 were notably higher. In the observed lesson, teaching was good and students worked hard, joining enthusiastically in a discussion about the external factors affecting the travel industry. Students gave numerous examples which included events of September 11, earthquakes in Turkey and floods in Cornwall. Students' assignments are of a good standard. They have good access to the ICT suite.

### **BUSINESS**

Economics was the focus in this curriculum area and business education was sampled.

Results in AVCE business studies, in 2003, were very high, in the top five per cent of schools. Results, in 2004, were a little lower but still likely to be well above average. In the lesson sampled, students made good progress in the marketing and finance modules. Students demonstrated above average understanding of break-even analysis. Teaching was well planned.

## Economics

Provision in economics is very good.

	Year 13
Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are above average with half the students, in recent years, gaining top grades
- Students' learning of subject knowledge and understanding is stronger than their development as independent learners
- Teaching is of a high quality but some lack of focus on clearly expressed learning outcomes makes it harder for the teachers to ensure that it meets all the needs of individual students

### Commentary

#### Examination results

196. Results in 2003 were above average. In 2004, results were lower with a noticeable drop in the proportion of students gaining the top grades. This was unexpected and the school has recalled some papers for consideration.

#### Standards and achievement

197. There is no economics course in the main school but about a quarter of students have followed business studies. Students joining the A-level course are above the national average as regards grasp of economic systems and principles. Students are well motivated and work hard at understanding what can often be a complex, tricky subject. Overall, they make very good progress in understanding economic theory and coping with abstruse mathematical models and formulas. Male and female students achieve equally well. Weaker students are well supported by teachers but those who find learning this subject very easy are not always fully stretched.

#### Teaching and learning

198. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Strengths lie in teachers' mastery of the subject, enormous enthusiasm, expectations of the students to do very well, and the pace of lessons. While lessons can sometimes be rather teacher-centred and not sufficiently focussed on specific, shared objectives, it is rare for students' attention to wander. The subject mentoring system is very effective in supporting students' learning. However, students do not have as much encouragement as they need to develop such individual learning skills as useful note-taking and Internet research. Learning is further supported by opportunities for trips and visits, including other EU countries, with plans to provide further support by increasing the number of visiting speakers from local commercial contexts. The potential of new technology is not used as fully as it might by teachers and students in support of classroom practice.

#### Leadership and management

199. Leadership provides a very good role model. Teachers work well as a team, supported and guided well, with sufficient flexibility to try new ideas and ways of working. Planning is very good and routine systems are very well managed. The subject is well resourced although heavily reliant on text and paper-based material. Ready access to ICT is limited.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

This was not a focus of the inspection. A very small number of candidates were examined in 2003. In the sampled lesson, standards were well above average. Very good teaching enabled students to make good use of visits to local health care settings to develop a high level of communication and caring skills.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

The school offers a general studies course which students follow using distance learning materials.

## 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	2	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>2</b>
Students' achievement	2	2
<b>Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>2</b>
Attendance	1	1
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	2
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well students learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	3
How well the curriculum meets students needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	2	2
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for students	1	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1	1
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	2	2
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).*