

INSPECTION REPORT

Copthall School

Mill Hill, London

LEA area: Barnet

Unique reference number: 101349

Headteacher: Lynn Gadd

Lead inspector: Elizabeth Charlesworth

Dates of inspection: 13th - 16th September 2004

Inspection number: 268786

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll;	1154

School address:	Pursley Road Mill Hill London
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Postcode:	NW7 2EP
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Telephone number:	020 8959 1937
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Fax number:	020 8959 8736
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
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Name of chair of governors:	David Hallworth
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Date of previous inspection:	9/11/1998
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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Copthall School is a large comprehensive school with a large sixth form in north London, with business and enterprise specialist status. Most students live very close to the school, though a small number of students join the sixth form from outside the immediate area. Very few students leave or join the school other than at the normal time, making the school population very stable. There is a very small number of Traveller children and refugee and asylum seekers. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is very high, though less than ten are at an early stage of learning English. Most races from around the world are represented in the school. The proportion of students claiming free school meals is broadly average. Attainment on entry is average, with the full spread of ability. The school is fully comprehensive in its socio-economic, cultural and ability mix. The number of students with special educational needs is average, the majority being emotional and behavioural needs. The proportion of students with statements is also average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19532	Elizabeth Charlesworth	Lead inspector	
10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector	
30597	Robina Howells	Team inspector	Mathematics
33324	Joanna Fullwood	Team inspector	English
5714	Frances Thornton	Team inspector	Science
18542	Gerald Griffin	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
32329	Andrew Stafford	Team inspector	Art and design
32672	Stephen Hammond-Evans	Team inspector	Design and technology
32209	Jane Burnett	Team inspector	Geography Sociology
24127	Jim Kidd	Team inspector	History
15075	Bryan Goodman-Stephens	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language
27665	Alrene Lees	Team inspector	Music
18888	Jan Boulton	Team inspector	Physical education Dance
15485	Roger Butler	Team inspector	Religious education
34416	Steve Davies	Team inspector	Physics
15277	Chris Vidler	Team inspector	Business education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **very good** school with many strengths, providing a very good standard of education and care for its pupils. Results in public tests and examinations are well above the national average. Through very good achievement, teaching and learning these standards are maintained in work seen during the inspection. The school is exceptionally well led by a headteacher of outstanding calibre supported and challenged by a very good leadership team and governing body. One of the many strengths of the school is the way it cares for its pupils, taking account of their personal needs in encouraging them to grow into responsible young adults. The school gives **very good** value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students including the sixth form gain results which are well above average as a result of very good teaching.
- The headteacher provides excellent leadership, and is ably supported by the very good governing body and very good leaders and managers at all levels.
- Students' very good attitudes to school result in harmonious relationships and a strong and dignified work ethic.
- Provision for students' personal development is very good.
- Parents speak highly of the very good relationship they have with the school.
- The school is short of resources, especially in information and communication technology (ICT), and there is insufficient satisfactory accommodation.
- Statutory requirements for the teaching of religious education are not met in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
- The school makes insufficient provision for students who do not conform to the high standards of behaviour expected, resulting in a high number of fixed term exclusions.
- There is an inconsistency in the way teachers assess students' work and guide them on how to improve further.
- Provision in the performing arts is very good with a high level of participation by students.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good and the school has maintained the high standards. Most of the key issues have been dealt with, although the school still has to find adequate time for the provision of religious education, and there is an urgent need for more ICT resources.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Year 11 and 13 results

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

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 pupils attained at the end of Year 9.

By the end of Year 9 national test results in 2003 were well above average, and according to teacher assessment in 2004 continue to rise. Students gain many more higher National Curriculum levels than other schools. Compared with schools with similar prior attainment on entry English is in the top 5 per cent of schools. Standards of work seen during the inspection are **above average**, through the **very good achievement** and students' strong commitment to high standards indicate that the rising pattern of test results is well established. GCSE results in 2004 were above the 2003 level of well above average, and the proportion of A* and A grades also increased. **Very good achievement** seen during the inspection is bringing about **well above average** standards of attainment. There were, however, a small percentage of students who left with no qualifications. The

commitment to **very good achievement** continues into the sixth form where results in 2003 were above average. In 2004 there was an increase both in the pass rate, which was close to 100 per cent, and in the proportion of students gaining A and B grades. Standards of work seen during the inspection are **well above average**. Students' personal development is **very good**. The school provides many occasions for students to mature and take responsibility, which they take up with enjoyment. The spiritual life of the school is particularly strong, especially through the well-planned and thought-provoking assemblies. The school successfully promotes **very good** attitudes and behaviour and attendance is **good**.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a **very good** standard of education for its students. The very good achievement of students comes about because of the **very good** teaching and learning, and the students' own very good attitudes. The school judged teaching to be good, but the inspection team found a high proportion of very good and excellent teaching, with very little that was unsatisfactory or poor. The school is rigorous in its selection of new staff and the high turnover over the last two years has resulted in the appointment of new, talented teachers. The curriculum is **good**, with very good arrangements for extra-curricular activities. Although the building provides a safe clean environment it is not large enough to cater for the specific demands of modern education, leaving students to work in unsatisfactory accommodation. The school attends **very well** to the care, welfare, health and safety of all its students. It provides **good** support and guidance and has good arrangements for involving students in school life. The school successfully promotes **very good** links with parents. Links with the community and other schools and colleges are **good**.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **very good**. The **very good** governing body supports and challenges the **excellent** leadership of the headteacher. Though it does not meet its statutory duty in providing religious education in Years 10 and 11, this does not impede students' development and achievement. Management of the school is **very good**, financial control is astute, allowing the school to continue to improve and run very smoothly.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Students know, and comment, that their individual needs matter to the staff. Students feel comfortable with, and confident in, their heads of year and tutors. Of the small number of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and who attended the meeting most were overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They particularly appreciate the way teaching stimulates high achievement. In their view the school is well led.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure consistency across the whole school in how teachers assess work and guide students in their improvement as already identified in the school improvement plan.
- Provide more effectively for the academic and personal development needs of the minority of poorly behaved students, as already identified in the school improvement plan.
- Continue to strive for better accommodation and resources, especially in ICT.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide for the teaching of religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

This is a large sixth form offering a very wide range of advanced level courses, complementing the very good range of vocational courses on offer in local colleges of further education.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **very effective** sixth form which caters very well for its students. A new head of sixth form, very well supported by the senior management of the school, gives very good leadership of the high achievement of students as they move into the sixth form from the main school. Teaching and learning are very good and students eagerly take part in the many enrichment activities and opportunities to work with local businesses. Sixth form students add much to the life and work of the whole school. The sixth form is **very cost effective**. There has been **very good** improvement since the previous inspection.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Results and standards in lessons are well above average and are attributable to very good teaching and learning.
- Students support each other very well in their quest for learning.
- The sixth form is very well led and managed.
- The morning tutorial session is not used productively by all tutors for the benefit of all students.
- Students enjoy the very wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Teachers know students very well and relationships are based on mutual respect.

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: English	Very good. Standards are well above average. Teaching and learning are good.
French	Good. Teaching and learning are good and standards are in line with expectations.
Mathematics	Very good. Standards are well above average and teaching and learning are good.
Science: physics	Very good. Teaching and learning are very good, supported by very good leadership and management. Students have very good attitudes and achieve well.
Sociology	Very good. Learning is good, supported by innovative teaching and good leadership and management. Students are developing very good attitudes to independent learning and achieve well.
Humanities: history	Very good. Teachers have a profound knowledge of their subject and their high expectations and effective questioning lead to well above average standards. Leadership is excellent.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing: design and technology	Very good. Standards are well above average based on very good teaching and learning. Leadership and management are very good.
Visual and performing arts and media: dance	Very good. Standards are well above average and achievement very good. Very good teaching inspired by very good leadership and management, promotes commitment in students.
Business	Very good. Achievement is very good because of highly effective leadership, which supports very good teaching.

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 school provides **very good** advice, support and guidance for students. Many students choose the sixth form at Copthall because of its reputation for high achievement and as a result they are successful in gaining places in higher education. The tutorial sessions which students have with their tutors do not uniformly provide a programme of activities and events to support students fully. However, the new head of sixth form already has plans to put in place a more structured programme of tutorials.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The head of sixth form has already made his mark and is giving **very good leadership**. This is supported by **very good management**, because the school has robust systems for reviewing performance and analysing the information it has in order to bring about improvement

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy the challenge of very good teaching and value the many opportunities to extend their studies outside school. Their high opinion of what the school offers in the sixth form is borne out not only by the very high proportion of students who stay on after Year 11 and Year 12, but also by the significant number of students who transferred from other schools. They say they are not disappointed in what the school offers.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

In Years 7 to 9 standards are **above average** and achievement is **good**. In Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, standards are **well above** and achievement **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in national test and examinations are well above average, especially at the higher grades.
- Most students passed all their AS and A level examinations with a high proportion of A and B grades in 2004.
- Students have a readiness to learn which results in very good achievement throughout the school.
- Students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language achieve very well.
- A small proportion of students left in 2003 without qualifications.

Commentary

Key Stage 3

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	37.5 (37.4)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	36.6 (36.1)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	34.9 (35.6)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 183 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

1. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 have been consistently well above average for several years, especially in the proportion of higher National Curriculum levels and most notably in English. In 2003 the school was accurate in its forecast, and its expectation that these standards would be maintained in 2004 has been fulfilled. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average so compared with schools with similar prior attainment, results are also well above average. Students did particularly well in their end of year teacher assessments in history, design and technology, music and art and design. In ICT teacher assessments were well below average but this was in part due to teachers not giving enough credit to students for the elements they did well. Similarly in physical education, not enough credit is given for students' success in achieving high standards in dance, so the physical education assessments appear lower. In ICT the lack of equipment is also holding down standards because students do not have enough opportunity across the other subjects to put into practice their skills and improve their achievement.
2. The school keeps very careful records of how well the different groups of students progress through the school, and although some of the ethnic groups, especially the girls from Somalia, are quite small the school was able to demonstrate that all students make equal progress. This is because teachers know their students well and constantly seek ways to help them fulfil their potential. Students' own readiness to learn, fostered from the beginning of Year 7 by their teachers, is fundamental to their good achievement. Higher attaining students including the gifted and talented students are particularly confident in their use of English to express views and opinions and to engage in debate. Achievement in the performing arts is a real strength in securing students' confidence and in developing individuality. Overall standards in lessons during the inspection were above average and achievement was good. Work in books,

supported by the school's evaluation, indicates that high standards will be maintained once students have settled into the new school year and that students put on a spurt towards the end of Year 9 to achieve their impressive results.

3. In most subjects, students with special educational needs are achieving as well as the other students as a result of the effective support in the classroom. However, limited financial resources mean there are insufficient staff to provide all the necessary support and in some situations, this limits students' progress.

Key Stage 4

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	65 (71)	52.0 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	93 (97)	91.0 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96 (97)	96.0 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	41.2 (41.3)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 181 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. While national GCSE results have been steadily rising, school results have fluctuated, reflecting the different ability of students as they entered the school. This is reflected by the school in the agreed targets, as part of the business and enterprise status, which were met in full. Nevertheless, results are well above average and rose again in 2004 to 67.4 per cent gaining A* to C grades, with an increase also in the proportion of A* and A grades. The school has completed a detailed analysis of the 2004 results, comparing subjects internally. Students significantly exceeded their own school average in food technology, music, sociology, business studies, ICT and science. In geography, resistant materials and art and design their results were below their other subjects. Inspection evidence shows that in art and design the internally assessed units were understated, resulting in fewer C grades.
5. The school is rightly concerned about a small group of girls, mostly with special educational needs, for whom a traditional examination course is not suited. A group of girls in Years 10 and 11 are now following courses where they are experiencing success, but in 2003 4 per cent, accounting for about seven students, did not gain a GCSE qualification.
6. Detailed analysis by the school of the relative progress of different groups shows that, because the school caters very well for the language and literacy needs, students from the black and minority ethnic groups, including those for whom English is an additional language, make marginally better progress than white English girls. However, overall students make very good progress from the start of school to the end of Year 11.
7. Work seen during the inspection indicates that the well above average standards are being maintained. Students achieve very well, building on their knowledge and understanding from earlier years. They use what they know to answer questions and solve problems, frequently presenting their findings to the class in a professional and mature manner. Students' commitment and the creation of a strong work ethic contribute significantly to their achievement.

Sixth form

8. Results in AS and A-Level examinations in 2004 rose from their above average level in 2003. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is broadly average compared with all sixth forms, though for some individual subjects there is a requirement to gain at least a GCSE grade B. Students achieve very well to gain their ambitious targets and entry to their chosen institute of higher education. Almost ten students in each of Years 12 and 13 gained A grades

in all their subjects, and the school historically has had many more A and B grades than is the average nationally, with a very high overall pass rate.

9. The school's own analysis shows that at ALevel students did significantly better in music, design and technology, sociology, and media studies than in their other subjects. In the sciences and geography they did less well, although there were only low numbers in music and physics.
10. In the subjects inspected in depth well above average standards were observed in dance, sociology and business education. Achievement in both years is overall very good. Students draw very well on their prior learning and in the early stages of new courses are learning new, more independent ways of working.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are **very good**. Attendance at the school is **good**. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students like their school and enjoy participating in all it offers.
- Students approach their work diligently and conscientiously.
- Students relate very well to others.
- The school is a dignified community because staff encourage students to behave well and act maturely.
- A small minority of students behave badly around the school and occasionally in lessons.

Commentary

11. The students talk with pride and enthusiasm about the wide range of activities they take part in so energetically and responsibly. They enjoy their lessons and are keen to do as well as they can so they work very hard. They maintain this enthusiasm for learning at home and are conscientious about their homework. Relationships throughout the school are very harmonious. Students have fun together in their work and leisure time. They care for others, whether of the same age and background or not, an aspect of students' behaviour which the school recognises as a strength. Year 10 and 11 students willingly volunteer to mentor younger students. They work very well together in lessons and this mutual support helps them learn from each other. The atmosphere around the school is calm and purposeful because students behave very well. Students are helpful towards adults, valuing the interest that staff take in their well-being. Respect between all members of the school community is evident in every school activity. However, a few students, especially in Year 8, behave badly but their behaviour seldom disturbs the harmony of the community or the work of others. The school sets very high standards for behaviour. Most staff manage these expectations consistently and students respond accordingly. The school has identified that occasionally a few students misbehave when the teacher fails to involve the students sufficiently in the lesson or to set clear expectations for their behaviour, and inspection evidence agrees with this view.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	5.5	School data:	1.7
National data:	7.2	National data:	1.1

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

12. Students attend the school regularly because they like the school and the school has very good procedures for working with parents to promote good attendance. Unauthorised absence is above the national average because the school does not authorise any holidays taken during term time. This exemplifies the school's approach to promoting the importance of school attendance. In addition, the school strictly enforces its rule that absence remaining unexplained after a week is recorded as unauthorised.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	353	37	1
White – Irish	7	0	0
White – any other White background	92	4	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	20	7	0
Mixed – White and Black African	17	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	20	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	52	3	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	149	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	52	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	18	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	44	2	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	29	9	0
Black or Black British – African	128	6	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	12	16	0
Chinese	57	0	0
Any other ethnic group	72	4	0
No ethnic group recorded	32	4	0

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

13. The school rarely excludes students permanently. The rate of fixed term exclusion is high and is increasing. About half of these exclusions are incurred by just a few students and usually result from incidents around the school rather than in lessons. The school analyses these figures carefully to ensure equal treatment for all students. The school currently has no internal accommodation for removing students for additional support for their behaviour, though staff are active in counselling, supporting and seeking work placements and alternative curriculum activities to help these students. A specialist group is working on developing a behaviour support unit as outlined in the school's own improvement plan. The school is therefore poised to improve support for the increasing number of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties coming to the school. Students are confident that the occasional incidence of bullying is dealt with promptly by the school.
14. Students place their trust in very good relationships, laying a firm ground for students' personal development, which is very good. Students are praised for their honesty and commended for kindnesses in the community. Students discuss moral and social issues in lessons and are made sensitively aware of ethical and moral issues, for example, in geography through use of poetry. Fair play and sportsmanship are fostered in physical education. This is an exciting and harmonious school community and students share their cultural and social experiences with enthusiasm, studying artists and authors from different ages and cultures.

Sixth form

Students have **very good** attitudes and behave **very well**. Their attendance is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students take very good responsibility for their own learning.
- Students show very high levels of interest in school life.
- Students establish excellent relationships with adults and one another.

Commentary

15. Sixth form students are determined to succeed in their lessons and wider activities and work very hard. They are ambitious for themselves and others and relish the additional activities that the school provides. They eagerly join the sixth form committee and energetically arrange clubs for themselves and younger students. They say that the wealth of different backgrounds represented in the school is a distinct school strength. Very high levels of mutual respect exist between students and with adults. The sixth form community at Copthall is dignified, mature and aspirational.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a **very good** standard of education. The curriculum is **good**, teaching and learning are **very good**. The school cares **very well** for students, providing **good** support and guidance. There is **very good** involvement of students and **very good** links with parents, other schools and the community.

Teaching and learning

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers expect the very highest standards of work and behaviour.
- Careful planning ensures that all students learn very well.
- Subject expertise among teachers stimulates and inspires students.
- A commitment to learning is fostered from the time students join the school.
- In a small minority of lessons students' behaviour and learning are not well managed.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 167 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9 (5.4)	52 (31.1)	61 (36.5)	40 (24)	4 (2.4)	1(0.6)	0

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

16. Teaching is very good and stimulates very good learning throughout the school. The school's evaluation of teaching and learning, supported by inspection evidence, lists the strengths as subject knowledge, high expectations, planning and support for all students. The school, also rightly, identifies the need to make use of more varied methods, and to this end has recently given to an assistant headteacher the role of leading the school in further evaluation of teaching and learning with an emphasis on sharing best practice. The school also recognises the small proportion of unsatisfactory aspects of teaching which, seen during the inspection, resulted in unsatisfactory learning.
17. Students increase their knowledge and demonstrate their deepening understanding because teachers know their subjects well, inspiring and motivating students. In practical lessons, particularly in the arts, students have very good examples to follow, creating in their own work independent thought and individuality. Teachers expect a great deal of their students, who rise to the challenge by producing work of a high quality. There is a sense of purpose. Students know what they are expected to learn and teachers keep them focused on this with probing

questions. Much of the very good learning comes about because of students' commitment and application to study. Examples of very good management of some challenging behaviour by teachers bear witness to the fact that teachers spend a great deal of time and effort in planning lessons which will engage all students, reaching out to those for whom learning does not come easily.

18. Teaching of students with special educational needs in mixed ability classes is good and teachers know these students well. Where there is support from teaching assistants, it is consistently good. However, in some lower ability groups, especially with a large proportion of special educational needs students, they do not learn effectively, as there is insufficient support available.
19. There are very good resources to support the induction of students with English as an additional language which result in students at an early stage of English language acquisition rapidly gaining the confidence and communication skills required to enable them to participate with support in lessons.
20. In the few unsatisfactory lessons observed it was the failure to manage behaviour which got in the way of learning. Students were not engaged in their learning and did not make the best use of their time.

Assessment

21. The quality of the assessment of students' work is satisfactory. The school has set assessment as a clear priority for development. A strength within the school is that assessment information is used well to track pupils' progress at the whole school level. As a result of routine and regular self-review and evaluation teachers track pupil progress and match work to students' capabilities. This way any underachievement is quickly identified and action is taken. Students' progress is assessed regularly in all subjects and thoroughly in most subjects. Marking is at least satisfactory in all subjects, though there is inconsistency across subjects on guidance given to students on how to improve. It is a strength in history and good in English, science, ICT, art and design, music and design and technology where teachers explain to pupils how well they are doing and how they can improve. The school has been developing this critical aspect of marking and so is well placed to incorporate the *Assessment for Learning* strategy into its own policy.

Sixth form

22. Students have a real thirst for learning and work well with their teachers in pursuit of high standards. Their independence and willingness to take learning outside the classroom are real strengths which demonstrate their commitment. Students themselves talk of the partnership with teachers, who treat them as adults and encourage this independence. Teachers bring expert knowledge not only of their subject but also of its relevance in the world of work. The business and enterprise culture of the school promotes very strong links with local and national businesses, which adds further stimulus to students' learning. Teachers adapt their methods very well to the smaller groups, employing a more tutorial style which prepares students very well for higher education.

Assessment

23. The quality of assessment of students' work is good. Assessment information is used well to track students' progress. Teachers mark and assess students' work well and effectively use the outcomes in planning lessons. They also make sure that students are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, a particular strength in physics and dance.

The curriculum

Students follow a curriculum that provides **good** opportunities for all. Enrichment is **very good**. The quality of accommodation and resources is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum supports the continuous raising of standards throughout the school.
- The continuity of the curriculum ensures constant and steady progress in students' learning.
- The business and enterprise status impacts positively on curriculum development.
- Extra-curricular activities are richly varied with exciting events for gifted and talented students.
- Statutory requirements are not met in the provision for religious education.
- The school environment is safe and healthy and provision is very good for wheelchair users, though the temporary classrooms are unsuitable.
- The development of ICT across the curriculum is insufficient.

Commentary

24. Curricular provision for all students is good because of the range of courses in place. It allows all students to achieve well, including those with special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and the gifted and talented. Most subjects have introduced aspects of the commercial world into their teaching as a result of the business and enterprise status of the school. The curriculum is enhanced by the skills and abilities of the staff who teach it. The grouping arrangements allow teaching to be targeted at the level at which students of all abilities make good progress.
25. Students' academic needs are well met and nourished by the very good open access policy to clubs and extra-curricular enrichment sessions. The school has a lively atmosphere generated by the number and frequency of drama, dance and musical practices and performances. There is a particularly wide range of opportunities in sport. Foreign visits are arranged in modern foreign languages and art and design which extend learning effectively. The school recognises the importance of residential visits to students' personal development, building these experiences to other parts of England and overseas into the yearly routine from Year 7 onwards. The well planned programme for personal, social and health education including careers education and citizenship, provides good opportunities for students to study contemporary issues, further contributing to personal development.
26. The gifted and talented are well provided for, starting with a summer school before they join Copthall in Year 7. There are links with higher education which the students find stimulating and motivating. The success of the school's provision for gifted and talented students is in the high proportion of examination success at higher grades.
27. The school provides a vocational course in leisure and tourism for a small number of students in Years 10 and 11. Plans for this new course extend to progression through to vocational A-Level in Years 12 and 13. The school also offers an accredited course under the auspices of The Prince's' Trust in Years 10 and 11 that develops students' self-esteem, life and social skills and maximises their opportunities. A small number of students who are not suited to traditional examination courses follow this in addition to a work-related programme.
28. Religious education in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form is offered only to students who choose to follow an examination course, and is a breach of statutory requirements. Assemblies are held every day and during the inspection the focus was the Jewish New Year when students of all beliefs were led into a period of reflection on the topic of refection and new beginnings. Discussions with staff and students indicate that this high quality of spiritual development is the norm for assemblies at Copthall.
29. The match of the teachers to the curriculum is good. All have specialist staff, many very qualified with a general profile of very good experience. Problems do exist in the special

educational needs department with not enough support staff to match the needs of the pupil population. Art and design had no head of department at the time of the inspection.

30. Accommodation is overall unsatisfactory, although the building provides a safe, clean and healthy environment. The building is not large enough to cater for the demands of the large number of students in the school and the demands of modern education. Many departments are forced to use non-specialised rooms often some distance from the department's specialist resources and key staff. Very good provision for the disabled and wheelchair users has been developed with lifts, ramps and access slopes around the whole building and site. The demountable classrooms are very poor classroom areas and have a very negative effect on both staff and students who are in the unfortunate position of using them.
31. Resources are satisfactory. However, ICT is underdeveloped in the majority of departments due to insufficient equipment and accommodation, and is affecting the quality of the overall provision of the school.

Sixth form

The curriculum provided is **good**. There is a good range of AS and A-Level courses which continue from Year 11. Although the range of vocational courses is narrow the curriculum overall complements that provided at nearby colleges of further education. There is a very good rate of completion of AS courses and continuity to complete at A-Level is also very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The range of subjects offered is extensive.
- The curriculum supports students' very good achievement.
- Curricular enrichment is good.

Commentary

32. The range of GCE AS and ALevel courses is very good. This enables students to achieve highly and progress onto higher education. Students have a choice of continuing to study subjects learned lower down the school, complemented by new but related courses. The school has recently introduced a vocational course in health and social care though attempts to introduce other vocational courses in business have not been popular with students and their parents who prefer the more traditional A-Level. The curriculum meets the wishes of the large number that stay on from Year 11 as well as those that join them from other schools. The vast majority of students who start courses complete them.
33. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities in which students enthusiastically take part. There are high expectations that all students are involved in the care and support of younger students. The students produce a weekly bulletin that includes the minutes of meetings whose content is relevant to all students. It is intended that sixth form tutor groups will contribute to school assemblies.

Care, guidance and support

The school has **very good** arrangements for the health, safety and welfare of students. It provides **good** support and guidance and promotes **very good** involvement of students in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The staff nurture very good relationships with students so they feel secure and valued.
- The school pays very careful attention to the safety and welfare of students.
- Students' confidence and commitment to the school increase because they get good personal advice and guidance.

Commentary

34. Students feel safe and secure, knowing that their individual needs matter to the staff. Students feel comfortable with, and confident in, their heads of year and tutors. Tutors use form periods very effectively to secure students' understanding of the school's systems, and expectations. Relationships between adults and students are characterised by mutual interest, respect and concern. Teachers track all students' personal development carefully. Teachers are alert to any negative changes in students' demeanour. They take prompt action to arrest any further deterioration and to help the student get back on track. Students with particular needs know that specialist staff provide sensitive and well-considered help. The school arranges good induction for new students so that students manage the transfer easily. Students receive good advice about choices for Year 10 and 11 courses, and for future career choices.
35. The school has comprehensive arrangements for child protection. Strong features of this provision are very good leadership and rapid communication, both within the school and external agencies. Staff promote a safe and healthy environment very effectively. Daily routines are carried out thoroughly. Staff with particular responsibilities for health and safety have an acute awareness of their roles. The recently developed student support service is already very effective and praised by the students. Highly proficient and very willing support staff ensure that information about students' needs flows very efficiently. The promotion of healthy eating is evident throughout the school. For instance, a wide selection of fruit is sold at break in the canteen.
36. Students are regularly consulted about their views through the school council. The school actively encourages students to think of ways of improving the school. Student opinion matters when adjustments and changes are considered. Year 11 students are 'buddies' to younger students and help them adjust to life in a secondary school. Peer mentoring and mediating are successful features of school life. Students recognise the school's efforts to involve them, and most respond very well.

Sixth form

The school has **very good** arrangements for caring for sixth form students. The school provides **very good** support and guidance and has **very good** arrangements for involving students in the work of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good academic support secures students' commitment to improvement.
- The school provides very good advice about future careers and courses.
- The morning tutorial session is not used productively by all tutors.

Commentary

37. Students value the very good support that teachers provide. Teachers routinely monitor and guide students' work very carefully. This enables students to manage their progress towards predicted grades and to achieve their potential. Tutors establish very good working relationships with their forms and meet the particular needs of individual students. The school ensures that students know about the wide range of courses and careers available to them. Staff give individual students the attention and support necessary to make informed choices. This secures the students' confident approach to the next stage of their education or to work. Almost all Year 13 students attended, and listened in rapt attention, to a session on university life at the London School of Economics. The programme for morning tutorial work is not yet firmly established. Half the sessions seen were pleasant occasions but lacked sufficient focus to add value to the students' life at the school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has **very good** links with parents. It has **very good** links with local schools and colleges and the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school works very conscientiously and successfully to harness parental support and involvement.
- Very good information ensures that parents know about their child's education.
- The school has productive links with the wider community.
- The school has good links with other schools to the benefit of students and staff.

Commentary

38. Staff work hard and effectively to include parents in the life of the school. A flourishing school association and many candidates for governor vacancies testify to the parents' desire to be involved. The association suggests the theme for the Annual Parents' Meeting with the governors and many parents attending. Parent governors are very involved in the school, for instance, as mentors to individual students. Any parental concerns are handled promptly using correct procedures. The school encourages parents to use heads of year as the first point of contact.
39. Teachers commit significant time and energy to informing parents about the progress their child makes. Reporting systems are very good because they support parental involvement. The school requires parents to discuss the report with their child, to reduce the identified five overall targets to three and to include these in a return slip. Most parents comply and say they value the process. The tick-box annual reports contain a wealth of information and are accompanied by good explanations of levels and grades. Year 7 parents have three meetings annually with school staff and are particularly well supported and informed. This helps the students settle well. The school provides good information about the future curriculum for each year group. Parents praise the weekly newsletters and value the emphasis on celebrating effort and achievement.
40. The headteacher is sincerely committed to working in partnership with other organisations. The school is energetic in its search for community partners particularly with local businesses to support its specialist status. Students benefit from a good range of activities because these partnerships are managed systematically. The school absorbs the skills and resources offered into the daily life of the school. Many partners, for instance, support the careers education programme and Young Enterprise activities.
41. Good links with other schools and colleges enable staff to share and extend their expertise. Students visit local schools on a good number of occasions. Many sixth form students support reading on a weekly basis in a local primary school. Regular dialogue with local schools promotes secure curriculum links. The transfer of information from other schools is efficient and timely. There are effective arrangements for sixth form students to access learning in other institutions.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The governance of the school is **very good**. Leadership by the **headteacher is excellent and very good by other key staff**. Management is **very good** and ensures that the school runs smoothly and continues to improve.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The inspiring leadership of the headteacher secures the commitment of the whole community to achieving high standards.
- School leadership motivates staff very effectively and creates successful teams.
- The governing body is a highly skilled and effective team who know the school well and challenge and support school development very effectively.

- The continuous development of the curriculum and teaching enables students to realise their potential.
- Self-evaluation is very well developed so the school knows its strengths and weaknesses.
- The arrangements for the teaching of religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form do not meet statutory requirements.

Commentary

42. The quality of leadership of the headteacher is excellent and is evident in all aspects of school life and performance. She has a clear view of how to raise standards for all students. Leadership has ensured that teaching and learning are monitored effectively to bring about improvement. The curriculum is reviewed regularly and changes put in place to realise the potential of all students.
43. Leadership encourages vigorous debate, leading to policies that benefit the whole school community. Members of the senior leadership team work closely with the headteacher in supporting and monitoring the work of the school. This provides a very good climate for learning. This is reflected in very high standards and very good results. Management evaluates very effectively the school's performance through the use of extensive data analysis. This leads to confident self-evaluation in subject departments that promotes change for improvement. Subject managers share the school's drive for improvement and through this, form effective teams with individual responsibilities. The school has a very strong commitment to staff development and although opportunities have been reduced because of budgetary constraints it has continued with the programme using its own resources. Part of this commitment is the partnership with institutes for teacher training. As well as offering school placements this forms an important part of the recruitment strategy.
44. Both leadership and management have improved since the previous inspection and both have contributed significantly to the schools' rising success. The school recognises the attitude of students and the parental support as aids to learning. The unsatisfactory nature of the temporary classrooms is a barrier, which the management team has done its best to minimise. The school has begun talks with an external organisation which would result in the replacement of the classrooms and at the same time increase the school's links with the community.
45. The governing body is very well led and organised so that governors have a genuine understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Governors are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses by involving themselves in the daily life of the school. They inform themselves regularly about the school's work through linking with individual departments and a very good programme of meetings and reports. They are also aware of the breach in statutory requirements in the lack of provision for religious education and are actively seeking ways to put right this deficiency. The inspection team has taken the view that this is a serious position and one which should be rectified with some degree of urgency. However, inspection evidence across the whole curriculum does not point to underachievement of students. The governing body shares the headteacher's aspirations and vision for the school and this proves an excellent basis for their partnership. Governors play a key role in the production of the improvement plan, securing the school's commitment to the pursuit of rigour. They use their industrial, business and academic experience to challenge the status quo and to bring additional skills and resources to the school.

Sixth form

Leadership and management are **very good**. The newly appointed head of 6th form has strong ideas about how to raise students' achievement further.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership has expectations that raise achievement.
- Management of transition to the next stage of education is very good.

Commentary

46. Leadership is building a strong sense of purpose through students' desire to be part of the sixth form at the school. There is an insistence on high personal standards, for example, in regular attendance. Management is very good. Standards are monitored regularly. The section leader and deputy review a different student's work each week and written recommendations are made about how to raise standards. All sixth form tutors monitor students' personal development and this is fed into their application forms for future education or employment.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,581,457	Balance from previous year	136,017
Total expenditure	4,619,236	Balance carried forward to the next	98,238
Expenditure per pupil	3294.59		

47. The school manages its finances very well and applies the principles of best value very well. The chair of the finance committee of the governing body brings his considerable expertise in financial management to bear and has guided the school through difficult times. In order to keep within budgetary limits all non-essential spending has been halted and teacher's contact time increased. For the time being this is being managed very well but soon there will be pressure on the budget to maintain equipment and replace stock, not the least of which is for ICT. The school is at present in negotiation with a local group to establish community facilities at the same time as increasing accommodation for students which will enable the school to get rid of its unsuitable temporary classrooms.

Work-related learning

The effectiveness of provision in the school is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has developed very good links with employers and uses them effectively to engage students in real issues related to the world of work.
- Students take responsibility for setting their own learning objectives for their work experience. Leadership and management of the work-related curriculum are very good.
- Some aspects of the curriculum are not co-ordinated which leads to a repetition of activities for the students.

Commentary

48. There are many opportunities for students to discover the world of work. All Year 10 students take part in Project 'M' involving local businesses, during which they develop and refine skills that are needed when applying for employment, such as writing curriculum vitae, letters of application, and learning interview skills. Students and employers have carefully evaluated the project, with the results clearly showing that students have made good progress in these areas.
49. The work experience programme is very well structured and organised. The school arranges its own placements. The students apply for positions to the work experience co-coordinator, producing their own learning objectives and evaluating their placement. This reflective process ensures engagement in the whole process and maximises the value of the experience. Skills necessary for this process are taught in citizenship and personal, social and health education lessons, but there is no liaison with Project 'M' which covers the same skill areas.

50. The leadership and management are very good as there is a clear vision as to how the curriculum is to be developed and the processes to put this into place are well underway. Not all subject areas are fully involved yet in the school's strategy for implementing work-related learning, and some departments are in the early stages of embedding this into their schemes of work.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' expectations are high so results are good.
- Good relationships and systematic routines result in good attitudes and behaviour.
- Good communications ensure consistency in practice.
- There are not enough information technology resources.

Commentary

51. Students enter with average attainment and by 14 attain above the national average, with 91 per cent of pupils attaining Level 5 or above and the school improving on its predicted scores by one level, on average. At 16, pupils are well above the national average in attainment with 81.1 per cent achieving grades A* to C in language and 82.9 per cent in literature. More pupils than the national average attain A* to G grades and the trend over the last five years has reflected this.
52. Standards at Year 9 are above average and achievement is good. Expectations of excellent behaviour mean that oral work is especially good. Students listen with concentration and articulate opinions confidently. Information technology is used to present work well. Literacy is good because the origins of words are discussed and students readily use dictionaries. Standards at Year 11 are well above average. Students achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. Reading is fluent and expressive. Work is well presented and PowerPoint, together with good planning strategies, assists them in structuring their writing. Very good progress is made by all abilities.
53. Teaching and learning throughout the school are consistently good. Teachers create good learning environments where listening and tolerance are emphasised. Thorough schemes of work result in well planned lessons and structured learning. Teachers have high expectations, which are evident in the good level of questioning, use of challenging resources, discussion and natural use of specialist words. Good reading habits are encouraged through reading lessons, journals and suggested titles. A vibrant library stimulates interest and assists students in their homework. Girls have opportunities to think imaginatively, to analyse and to make predictions about their reading. The relationship between girls and teachers is exemplary and students seek advice about their work. The students respond with co-operation and good manners. As the school evaluation said, students usually know what they have to do to improve because their work is assessed, not only by teachers but by their peers and targets are agreed. Some students would benefit from having more reminders of these.
54. The school has concentrated on planning and assessment and this was evident during the inspection. Teachers accustom students to good learning routines where they listen attentively, employ study skills like annotation, and learning is consolidated through a curriculum which is logically planned. Teachers have high expectations and share their aims with the students who respond maturely. Lessons are busy and generally well paced to maintain interest. Regular, relevant homework reinforces learning. Students are involved and enthusiastic. They want to do well and evaluate each other's work using examination criteria which help them to know what is required. Teachers organise pairs and groups to facilitate discussion and students work with concentration responding to questions thoughtfully. In the particularly good lessons, a variety of methods were used to appeal to different ways of learning.

55. Leadership and management are very good. The leadership of the department has a clear view of the direction which the department should take and is very efficient in managing change. Consistency has been the focus of the department since its review and this has been very successfully promoted, given the staff changes and high number of part-time teachers. The department handbook reveals a department which is self-aware. It analyses results and monitors teaching in order to inform its practice, just as the school's own evaluation indicates. Communication systems are effective within the department and there is a successful programme of induction for new staff. The teaching is founded on good programmes and policies, which the team has devised within a hard-working and harmonious environment.
56. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection. Information technology has been written into some schemes of work and teachers have received training on PowerPoint presentations, which are used to encourage Year 10 and 11 students to structure their writing more logically. Restricted access to computers remains a barrier to further progress in this field. The results have improved and show a consistent trend of being above the national average. The department is objective in its self-assessment, so it is in a strong position to make further progress.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. The school has recognised the importance of literacy as an invaluable aid to learning and has set about implementing a policy to raise standards of achievement. A working party has produced professionally published booklets of key words used by the different subjects within the school. Attractive posters display the words in classrooms, so that pupils are constantly aware of them and can spell them properly. Departments have been encouraged to devise policies of their own and these are submitted to the working party, which is made up of subject representatives. Training has been provided on language processing and on speech impairment. Although not all departments have devised policies yet, most make good use of key words and some recognize the importance of correcting grammatical and spelling errors in students' writing. There is much good work going on with regard to definitions of words and use of dictionaries, reading aloud and the use of literature to demonstrate points in subjects like geography and science. The success of these advances is especially evident in the students' ability to articulate their ideas confidently.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning result in good achievement in French, German and Spanish.
- The lack of specialist accommodation and poor access to ICT impede learning.
- The good leadership and clear vision of the recently appointed head of faculty result in teachers working towards common goals.

Commentary

58. Results in teacher assessments in 2003 in modern foreign languages were in line with what is expected nationally at the age of 14 years. In 2004 the number of students reaching the expected level fell. However, in work seen during the inspection standards are average. Most Year 9 students express simple opinions and write and speak about familiar topics using basic structures. Additionally students with special educational needs and students with English as an additional language produce similar standards, when provided with clear written examples to support and guide them. This represents good achievement in Years 7 to 9.
59. In GCSE French in 2003 results were above the national average and a high proportion of students gained grades A* and A. In 2004 GCSE results in French fell by 25 per cent. In GCSE German in 2003 results were well below the national average. In 2004 GCSE results in

German rose significantly. In 2003 the results in Spanish GCSE were above the national average and similar results were obtained in 2004.

60. Standards of work observed in the inspection in all three languages in Years 10 and 11 are in line with national expectations. By the end of Year 11 in French, German and Spanish high attaining students produce work, which meets the requirements of the higher grades at GCSE. Generally students' listening skills are well developed and pronunciation of most students is good. Students' spoken language is generally limited to short utterances unless they have access to written notes or cues. With the aid of guidelines and written cues, students produce accurate written work on GCSE topics. Students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Most students achieve well because lessons have a clear structure and work is well matched to their needs and good support is given to individuals. Students with special educational needs and students with English as an additional language achieve well because of the step-by-step approach in lessons and the good use of mime and gesture to support comprehension.
61. Teaching and learning in all three languages are good. Teachers' very good linguistic skills and good subject knowledge have a very positive impact on learning, especially the development of listening and speaking skills. Students in all three languages generally respond well to brisk, well structured lessons, which make use of stimulating activities and resources. Most students learn well, when given the opportunity to work in pairs or groups, though a small minority are disaffected and teachers have to work hard to re-motivate them. The marking of students' work is regular and comments are encouraging, but do not always give advice on how students can improve. Students' learning is particularly enhanced by the very good relationships between teachers and students. The limited access and use of ICT results in some missed opportunities for independent learning.
62. The leadership of the faculty is good. The recently appointed head of faculty and the three new heads of department have a clear vision and are developing a strong team of skilled teachers, who work very hard to achieve their goals. There is now a clear departmental development plan, new schemes of work and clear strategies for monitoring teaching, learning, achievement and attainment. The day-to-day management of the department is satisfactory and the management of the department overall is satisfactory. The lack of specialist accommodation impeded teaching and learning on three of the lessons observed. Teaching, learning and achievement in lessons are better than at the time of the previous inspection, but results in external examinations have been inconsistent, so improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average.
- Students work hard and want to learn.
- Teaching and learning are good and much is very good.
- Leadership and management are good focusing on the maintaining and raising of standards.
- Short-term planning and assessment processes are not rigorous enough to help pupils in their learning.
- The classes of lower-attaining students do not have the regular support of teaching assistants.

Commentary

63. Results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above average, though not as high as the previous inspection. The results rose in 2004. The standard of work seen in Year 9 is above average and reflects the students' increasing confidence and competence in all areas of mathematics. They extend their knowledge of number, algebra, geometry and handling data. They do a variety of activities and exercises to **practise** calculating, problem solving and investigating, becoming adept at managing fractions, decimals and percentages. In Year 7 students are introduced to algebra and, by Year 9, they have good understanding with higher-attaining students solving complex equations. Achievement is good.
64. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average and an improvement on the previous year indicating very good achievements. The 2004 results are also very good. The standard of work seen in Year 11 is well above average. The majority of students study at the intermediate or higher level GCSE. The higher-level classes enjoyed the challenge of tackling complex simultaneous equations. Students at all levels achieve well, displaying a mature attitude toward the examination course.
65. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Much is very good but a small minority is unsatisfactory as was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Good lessons begin with activities to **practise** mental arithmetic, reinforce basic-skills or focus on new skills. The main focus of these lessons helps students achieve its aims and ensure challenge. Students are encouraged to work independently by being given regular homework, and to work collaboratively through small-group discussion and problem solving. Teachers congratulate the students and inform them of the extent of their successes. Teachers do not necessarily record this information to help them adjust their planning of following lessons. Where teaching is very good, planning is meticulous, expectations are high, teacher–pupil relationships are strong and teachers are skilful in eliciting students' thought processes to ensure maximum learning. These teachers continuously assess the students' progress and adjust questions, explanations and activities to match the learning styles of individuals and provide extra help or challenge where needed. They are generous with praise for effort, which encourages the students to work hard and to enjoy learning. Where teaching is less than good, teachers do not interact as well with the students and do not assess the students' understanding during the course of lessons. Some lessons have an insufficient range of activities to match the various learning styles of the students. The quality of marking is generally satisfactory but it does not help students to improve their learning because there are no references to National Curriculum levels to inform students of their progress and there are few comments that give advice or encouragement.
66. Lower-attaining students are taught in small groups and where teaching is good these students make good progress. However, only occasionally do these groups benefit from the much-needed support of teaching assistants. The use of ICT has improved since the previous inspection. Some teachers make good use of the department's electronic white boards and students frequently use graphical calculators and when appropriate they use the school's computer suites. Future plans for increasing the application of ICT include more training for teachers and the purchase of laptop computers. The faculty's contribution to citizenship and to students' spiritual and cultural development is left to individual teachers but as opportunities to address these elements are not identified in the schemes of work, they may be missed. The teachers, being good role models, contribute well to the students' personal development. The faculty provides enrichment opportunities such as tackling the 'problem of the week' and for selected students, participation in the UK mathematics challenge or university master classes. It offers Saturday lessons at certain times of the year, and at other times students are encouraged to ask for help between lessons. However, there are no mathematics clubs or clinics for students to attend on a regular basis.
67. The leadership of the department is good. The previous head and deputy head of faculty have established good team working and management processes. Examination and test data are collated, analysed and used to identify areas needing improvement to raise standards. The annual subject review summarises the faculty's successes and identifies further areas for

development. The department is currently preparing target-setting and progress-tracking processes for students. Appropriate schemes of work are in place but need adapting to help teachers improve short-term planning and assessment and to focus on the quality of learning. The faculty has already identified the need to introduce more rigorous monitoring. The previous deputy is now head of faculty and shows the determination to bring about the changes needed to maintain and improve the high standards already achieved.

68. Learning resources are very good but the accommodation for mathematics is unsatisfactory as there are too few rooms. The habit of each teacher moving from room to room is detrimental as it hinders organisation and does not allow time between lessons for evaluation jottings or to refocus on the needs of the next class. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

69. The mathematics department's initiative to address the application of mathematics across the curriculum has been very effective. The students' mathematical skills allow them to enhance their learning in a variety of subjects across the curriculum and their use of mathematics in other subjects supports their work in mathematics lessons. In science the students' mathematical skills are used effectively to collect and interpret data, to take measurements and to make various calculations. In physics, the students experience no difficulty in manipulating equations. In geography students apply their mathematical skills very well. Students use coordinates during map reading exercises and are competent in analysing data displayed graphically. Students' mathematical skills are also applied very well during spreadsheet work in ICT lessons. In design and technology, students measure accurately and use appropriate techniques when representing data as graphs.
70. The mathematics faculty has already provided training in the use of mathematics across the curriculum. An audit of the extent of the use of numeracy in other subjects has taken place to identify where and when particular topics are being taught. It is the aim of the head of faculty, through regular auditing and staff training to ensure a continued consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics in all subjects. Such initiatives will also inform the faculty's planning to provide reinforcement work or to avoid unnecessary repetition.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in the GCSE examinations.
- Achievement in science is good because teaching is good and teachers use assessment information to guide improvement.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use well to interest students.
- Marking is inconsistent and does not always help students to improve their work.
- Unsatisfactory resources limit provision of ICT for students.

Commentary

71. Overall standards at age 14 are above average. Results in tests at the end of Year 9 were above the national average in 2003 and maintained in 2004. This represents good achievement as these students arrived at the school with average results. Test results of more able students were well above average. Results in science were better than those in mathematics but lower than those in English. They were above average when compared with those in schools with students with similar prior attainment. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average in all aspects of science.
72. Overall standards in science at age 16 are well above average. Results in GCSE science were well above average in 2003 and maintained in 2004. This represents good achievement from the end of Year 9 to the end of Year 11. The school enters more students for double award

science than other schools nationally and the A* to C and A* to G grades were well above average. A much higher percentage of students achieved the highest grade than students nationally. A few students who are identified by the school as weak in both science and other subjects and needing more support are entered for single science. All achieved a result in 2003.

73. Students in Years 9 and 11 are working at above average standards. This is because achievement is closely monitored and any pupil who is not doing as well as expected is given help in order to improve. This support means that all students, including those with English as an additional language or those with special educational needs achieve well throughout their time at school. Gifted and talented students also achieve well in lessons and in test and examination results.
74. Teaching and learning are good overall. Where the learning is very good, teaching is innovative and students are expected to think for themselves. It is collaborative but challenging, for example, students giving presentations using ICT. Students are given the opportunity to reflect on their learning by self-assessment, whilst the teacher guides key learning points. As a result, students' understanding is probed and extended. There are several strengths in much of the teaching that underpin the good quality of students' learning. Teachers share clear learning intentions and lessons are well prepared. They set regular homework to build on work completed in lessons. Most teachers have good behaviour management strategies, which results in the right climate for learning. Teachers have good specialist knowledge, which most teachers can translate into good questions at the correct level, skilful explanations and a good range of activities that make science interesting. As a result, students learn effectively. In a minority of lessons, this does not happen and learning is satisfactory rather than good. In these lessons the lesson either lacked challenge or the activity was too complex for a minority of students who needed a lot of support to learn. Teaching supports literacy and mathematical development effectively.
75. Assessment is good. Requirements of examination are taught well. Teachers set targets and monitor progress on a regular basis. They know students' strengths and weaknesses through regular tests and homework. Marking is regular but there is variability in quality. Not all teachers give enough guidance to students on how they can improve. Assessment of science enquiry is accurate and reflects teachers' very good knowledge of test and examination criteria. The faculty has introduced peer assessment and where it is used it helps students to diagnose what they have to learn to improve their achievement.
76. Currently there is no head of faculty in post. However, the science faculty are a strong team who work well together and support the clear school vision and high expectations for students. Heads of subject are providing leadership of the curriculum and teaching. They are taking advantage of a national initiative in science to improve teaching and learning. There is a clear focus on raising students' achievement.
77. Management is good. The department evaluates its own performance effectively. It celebrates strengths and accurately identifies weaknesses. There are effective school systems of tracking pupil progress and teachers use this information to measure pupil progress. The recording system in science has been recently refined. Heads of subject have managed new staff effectively. The head of Years 7 to 9 monitors individual students' performance and reviews patterns across classes effectively. He ensures support is provided for students who are not achieving as much as they should. Technicians work very efficiently and effectively and provide excellent support to teachers.
78. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. There is improving use of ICT for science, but unsatisfactory resources limit use. In spite of the changes of the faculty leader, science has maintained high standards, good achievement and good teaching since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good overall because students receive good teaching.
- Good personal support in lessons accelerates individual pupils' learning.
- Lack of teaching time in Years 7 to 9 leads to some topics only being covered superficially.
- Lack of computers restricts ICT learning opportunities across the school.

Commentary

79. Results for GCSE short course ICT were above the school's average in 2003. These are above the national average and students gained their predicted grades. This was an improvement over results in 2003. In the Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) tests the results were at the national average.
80. For students currently studying for GCSE, standards are above average. Students have a good grasp of all software packages and can apply their computing skills well to solve problems. Students have a good understanding of complex databases. High attaining students plan and evaluate their work to a high standard. For students studying for CLAIT examinations, standards are average reflecting the lower attainment of the group. Here students can insert simple formulas correctly into spreadsheets but need help with a formula to calculate VAT.
81. By the end of Year 9 standards are below average overall and this confirms the school's teacher assessments. In some topics standards are above average and these include word processing, desktop publishing and web page design. Students' skills when using spreadsheets for data handling and modelling are average. Their skills, knowledge and understanding of using computers to measure and control and the impact of computers in society is superficial and below average.
82. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory because there is too little teaching time to cover all topics in sufficient depth. In Years 10 and 11 students catch up and achievement here is very good. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to other students.
83. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations and make work challenging and students work hard. Lessons are conducted at a lively pace and students are very productive. Classes are well managed; students behave well and are thoroughly engrossed in the work. Well produced resources give learners a good level of independence. The experienced teachers know the needs of all students well and provide them with specific help ensuring all make good progress with their learning. Homework, which reinforces and extends class work well, is a feature of the best lessons. A Year 9 group eagerly evaluated a web page they had designed as homework against a set of criteria they had discussed in class. All lessons begin with an introduction but these do not sufficiently review what has already been achieved to gauge progress to date. Lesson summaries do not always include a review of what has been learned in the lesson to reinforce achievement.
84. Leadership and management are good. There is a firm commitment to training teachers and raising standards. The department supports the school well by teaching ICT in a Business and Enterprise context. The ICT self-review is accurate and is used well to plan. Assessment is good. The department has a wealth of data on standards and is now well placed to use this to guide teaching and planning. There are coherent plans for cross-curricular ICT but these are not yet established because the computer provision is poor.
85. Progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Most of the issues raised in the previous report have been successfully dealt with, standards have risen, the National Curriculum is now implemented and the good teaching has been sustained. The limited cross-

curricular provision mentioned in the previous report has not been resolved. A barrier to progress is the poor computer provision across the school. Extra laptop computers have recently been purchased to extend ICT use but this will still leave the school with fewer computers than would be expected in a school of Copthall's size.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

86. ICT across the curriculum is underdeveloped because of the shortage of computers. The school has recently purchased more laptop computers to improve access to ICT. Most departments have realistic plans for using computers and staff are well trained. In history and religious education students use web research well to support their learning. In mathematics students have limited access to specialist software to produce graphs, spreadsheets and control software to extend their skills. Students' have too few opportunities to use specialist software in art and design, design and technology and music. Overall ICT standards across the curriculum are below average by the end of Year 9 and average by Year 11.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and achievement very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching is very good and students benefit from a wide range of methods to meet their individual learning needs.
- Leadership is excellent and has a clear vision for the development of the subject.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

87. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were well above average. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average. Students achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and make good progress in the acquisition of historical skills and in understanding how historians reach their judgements. Because teachers place great emphasis on literacy, most students are beginning to express their views using the relevant historical terminology. Students have a good understanding of the reasons why the domestic system eventually died out at the end of the 18th century and speak about conditions in the mills with accuracy.
88. In 2003 GCSE results were well above average and the percentage of students gaining grades A* and A was twice the national average. The proportion of A* to C grades was maintained in 2004 and from an equally large entry. Standards in Year 11 in work seen during the inspection are well above average. Students are articulate and deliver oral presentations with confidence and interest. In Years 10 and 11 achievement is very good. Students handle evidence with skill, analyse it effectively and detect bias rapidly.
89. Very secure subject knowledge, effective questioning and a variety of strategies to encourage learning in the preferred style are the key features of teaching in all years. For example, in an excellent Year 11 lesson on multi-cultural Britain, every student made an active contribution to class discussion, because the resources and the emphasis on group work and role-play encouraged each individual to play a full part. Furthermore, because students are required to evaluate the work of their classmates and because they receive detailed advice on examination technique, they are very well prepared for the rigours of GCSE. Teaching and learning are, therefore, never less than satisfactory and are very good overall.
90. Detailed and accurate evaluation of departmental performance and a clear commitment to the development of the subject are just two elements of the outstanding leadership in history. Management is very good, teamwork is of the essence and teachers are concerned to further their students' understanding of just how they may improve their work. There has been good

improvement since the previous inspection in the use of ICT and in the quality of teaching resources. However, accommodation remains unsatisfactory, in that classrooms are situated in all corners of the school and the learning environment suffers as a result.

Example of outstanding practice

A Year 11 history lesson about Jewish immigration to Britain in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Students came into the lesson in good humour and they were obviously prepared for some hard work but some fun, too. This lesson was no different and, even though some tasks the youngsters had to do were difficult, they really tried hard and they put as much into it as they could. Questions came at them thick and fast and even when they had answered them, the teacher, with a smile on her face, asked them some more! There was real competition between the groups, but when the pupils were evaluating how well their classmates had delivered their presentations, they were very fair and they stuck to the criteria the teacher had given to them without fear or favour. By the end of the lesson they had a really impressive understanding of why Jewish immigrants were sometimes not welcomed in Britain and often by members of their own race. They were quite indignant at the way some human beings treat others. You could see just how proud they were of their efforts and because they were so interested in the subject, they didn't realise how complex some of it was. As they said to the inspector, 'we enjoy history because the teacher always gets us to talk to each other and test out our ideas with our friends'. They went on and added, 'this is just how our history lessons are, and we've not put on a show'.

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Collaborative teamwork is providing the basis for departmental improvement and the raising of standards across all year groups.
- The head of department provides clear leadership and direction to the work of the department.
- Marking is not consistently used alongside assessment information to set targets to help students learn.
- The profile of geography is improving as a direct consequence of the focus on quality and challenge in lessons.

Commentary

91. In 2003 results at GCSE A* to C were above the national average. In 2004 the results were above the national average for A* to B but fell below for the lower grades due to weak interpretation and investigative skills. Standards of work seen in Year 11 were above average. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good due to the quality of teaching and the development of independent study and skills of enquiry. The introduction of lunchtime workshops for Year 11 will help to improve their coursework results and the interpretation of examination questions.
92. By the end of Year 9 in 2003 the teacher assessments judged the proportion of students gaining Level 5 and above to be below the national average. 2004 has seen an upward trend in results. The department has improved the moderation of students' work this year and introduced common mark schemes as well as peer and self-assessment. Standards seen during the inspection in Year 9 were average. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Students' attainment on entry to the school is below that expected. Students enter the school with a variation in geographical skills and knowledge. Testing has been introduced at the start of Year 7 to gauge prior learning and improve teachers' planning and the transition from Year 6 to 7. The department has recently introduced tasks such as innovative card games, which have been successful in bringing the number of students gaining higher levels by the end of Year 9 in 2004 in line with the school average.
93. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Where lessons were good during the inspection teachers used imaginative and challenging strategies to develop problem solving and create a challenging atmosphere in which students thrive. Students develop an enquiry approach to

geography through the successful use of group tasks. Where lessons were less than satisfactory, it was because poor behaviour and slow pace had a negative impact upon learning. This was because teachers did not plan their use of time and resources well to challenge and motivate the students. Students' work seen during the inspection revealed some inconsistencies in the quality of marking. At best, comments were helpful and aided learning. However, there were missed opportunities to show students how to improve their work and to acknowledge what they do well. Department systems for recording students' progress, monitoring work and individual target setting have been introduced over the last two years. The assessment systems and informative feedback are not fully integrated into the day-to-day work of all the department to facilitate pupil learning and impact upon standards. When used, homework challenges and extends what is learned in the lesson. Local and residential fieldwork experience to improve students' personal development and skills of enquiry is well developed from Year 7.

94. Leadership and management of the department are good. The recently appointed head of department manages the day-to-day running of the department efficiently. She has a clear vision to raise standards and improve teaching and learning in the department. The introduction of a system of resource sharing and collaborative planning has led to improvements in teaching and learning by the end of Year 11. Schemes of work have been reviewed and are in the process of being enhanced to include assessment, resources and different teaching and learning strategies. A closer working relationship with the learning support department has been developed to implement ways to improve the learning of special educational needs students.
95. Since the previous inspection, the department has made good progress, developing and integrating the use of ICT into schemes of work. The monitoring of students' work has led to an improvement in results at the end of Year 11. The department are now using map skills more fully in Year 7 and with students in Years 10 and 11.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement are very good both at the end of Year 9, and in the GCSE examinations for those students who take them.
- There is very good, innovative, teaching.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- The subject makes a considerable contribution to the personal development of students who study it.
- The school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide religious education for all students in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

96. Students arrive in Year 7 with a wide diversity of prior experience of religious education but generally with levels of knowledge and understanding lower than that anticipated by the locally agreed syllabus. However, students are quickly engaged in and enthused by their study of religion, and in Year 9 they are typically performing at a standard well above expectations with teachers assessing almost a quarter of students reaching the higher levels. This represents very good achievement.
97. In recent years a relatively small group of students have studied this subject in Years 10 and 11, leading to either the GCSE full course or short course. For students who have taken these public examinations, results in 2003 were well above average. In 2004, all 11 students obtained grades A* to C, with several students far exceeding their predicted grades. However, though the majority of students do not take the examination, their personal and academic development overall is not held back because the school provides many opportunities for

students to share their religious and cultural backgrounds with each other.

98. Overall teaching and learning are very good. Excellent relationships between teachers and students, and amongst the students, encourage an atmosphere where open and purposeful discussions lead to students developing high-level skills of argument and analysis. Innovative teaching methods enhance learning for students with a range of learning needs, as in Year 9 lessons where teachers drew on their own experiences of being new mothers to explain the importance of religious and non-religious ceremonies associated with welcoming and naming new babies. Lessons are thoroughly and carefully planned and good use is made of a somewhat restricted range of learning resources to ensure all lessons incorporate a variety of learning experiences that meet the needs of different students.
99. Assessment of students' attainment is systematic and thorough and done in ways that support the learning of individual students. There is, however, a somewhat confusing range of marking practice with students being assessed by grades, by marks and by levels. Whilst marking is always encouraging, it is not yet always sufficiently specific as to what students need to do to improve.
100. Leadership and management of religious education are very good, with both teachers of the subject exercising leadership in different aspects of the subject's development. Whilst neither is a subject specialist by initial training, both have undertaken considerable professional development and are now knowledgeable and experienced teachers of the subject. Departmental self-evaluation is a particularly strong feature, being both rigorous and comprehensive. Students are involved in a systematic review of units of work and this leads to continual updating and improvement in curriculum and teaching practice. The subject leader is developing proposals for senior management team to adopt in order to meet the statutory requirements in Years 10 and 11.
101. There has been satisfactory improvement in this subject since the previous inspection. Whilst the issue of providing religious education for all students in Years 10 and 11 remains unresolved, there has been very good improvement in the provision for students in Years 7 to 9 where standards have improved considerably, as they have also for those students in Years 10 and 11 who follow an examination course.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average in all areas.
- Very good teaching and learning are maintaining high standards in work seen during the inspection.
- Displays of students' work help stimulate and promote high standards.
- Students have very good behaviour, attitudes and the ability to work independently and collaboratively.
- Drawing, designing and the development of ideas need to be improved, together with better use of ICT.

Commentary

102. GCSE results were well above average in 2003, and results for 2004 show a similar picture. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 are well above average standards and represent very good achievement. This is made possible by very good teaching and learning, very good teamwork and an active, shared commitment to continuous improvement in teaching and learning. In food technology, students make particularly good progress as a result of very good teaching linked to the objectives set out in the GCSE syllabus and the National

Curriculum requirements. Folders of students' work show excellent planning and time use in the months before the GCSE examinations.

103. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 judged standards to be well above average. This is consistent with levels of attainment in Year 9 which are also well above average. As students join Year 7 with below average standards in this subject they achieve very well through Years 7 to 9. However, the important communication skills of hand drawing of objects, products and ideas need greater emphasis in Years 7 to 9.
104. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school, with some excellent features. Features of the very good lessons are the variety of tasks, where students are encouraged to read aloud and make suggestions in a supportive but challenging atmosphere. All lessons seen were well organised and planned and provided opportunities for very practical approaches to learning. There is a good balance between practical and writing activities, hands-on then review. Students' positive attitude and very good behaviour in this area are very positive factors in creating very good learning. The department is a very stimulating environment with excellent examples of students' work on display, setting the scene for the existing students and promoting very high standards. However, the ICT provision is inadequate and is having an impact on the learning of many students.
105. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The acting head of department has a vision that is shared by the team of teachers. Very good sharing of ideas and skills takes place and the active encouragement of learning from each other is evident. In food technology the team of teachers is very experienced and has created an excellent learning environment made possible by excellent teamwork and management of the head of department. Very good systems are in place for assessment, reporting and target setting.
106. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Sustained improvements in standards and achievement have been made in all years. Teaching and learning are better than at the time of the previous inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results which had been declining over recent years, look set to improve due to rising standards among present students.
- Teachers provide well for all students, resulting in good achievement for all ethnic minorities.
- The determination of the teaching staff to drive up standards is a strong feature.
- Well-prepared lessons, that incorporate good pace, engage students effectively in their learning.

Commentary

107. At the end of Year 9 in 2004 teachers' assessments show that the students are attaining above the national average. Attainment at present, in the second week of the year, is average. Students enter the school with variable skills but they are average overall. They progress to achieve well by the end of Year 9. This is because good teaching develops students' understanding of the concepts and techniques used in creative art and design. Lessons are well organised, have clear objectives and there is a high expectation by the teachers that students will produce good quality outcomes. However, some students in Year 9 do not fully understand some of the basic rules of perspective. This affects the accuracy of their observational drawing. Students with special educational needs and those from ethnic minorities achieve as well as do others. All students get equal attention, according to the level of their need, with more support being given to those who most need it.

108. GCSE results have declined over recent years. From being well above the national average in 1998 they fell to average in 2003. In 2004 results fell again but this was largely due to internal marking of GCSE work being too harsh. Present indications are that results are set to improve. In work seen during the inspection standards in Year 11 are above average, representing good achievement. Use of the formal elements of art is effective and this enables most students to show that their learning has been good. Students research their work well, often using the Internet for information about topics and artists. In lessons teachers expertly use a variety of methods to complete the work they set out to do, which students follow through by continuing to work at home and this raises their achievements. Clear constructive comments tell all students what they need to do to improve. Examples of high standards of work displayed in corridors and in art rooms, are used effectively to guide and support students' progress.
109. The department is well led and managed and subject leaders are making good progress in halting the decline in GCSE results. They have carried out a rigorous self-evaluation of the department's past performance. They are developing a fresh scheme of work, which incorporates the use of specialist software on computers. The robust support that new teachers are receiving enables them to develop the quality of their teaching. Systems and procedures are being sustained well in the absence of a designated leader of the subject. The momentum of students' learning is being sustained by the smooth and efficient day-to-day running of the department. Visits to art galleries extend students' learning experiences. This, and more teaching after school, enhances students' achievements. Assessment since the previous inspection has improved and, though GCSE results have declined, standards are rising in work seen, making overall improvement satisfactory.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Year 9 and well above average in Year 11.
- GCSE results are improving strongly.
- Students achieve very well overall, making very good progress from Year 7 to Year 11.
- The department has improved very well since the previous inspection as a result of very good leadership and management.
- There are no computers for composition work in Years 7 to 9, which holds back achievement.

Commentary

110. Standards in Year 9 are above average and are consistent with teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004. Students come to the school with just below average standards. Achievement is good. Most students have very well developed keyboard skills. They move round the keyboard confidently and securely using fingers and hands correctly. Most students add additional notes to chords, finding them quickly and efficiently. Higher attainers vary the chord formation using more complex and syncopated rhythms. They compose convincingly without using computers, relying on the sounds they create on the keyboard. The lower attainers find this more difficult and need computers to help them. Currently there is only one computer in the department.
111. Standards in Year 11 are well above average. Achievement at this level is very good. Students have the advantage of using a computer for GCSE composition and achieve a very high standard. They perform with a sense of style and conviction, which is compelling to listen to. Students' listening skills and general knowledge about music and its historical development are well rehearsed. GCSE results in 2003 showed that 15 out of the 16 students achieved a grade from A* to C. These results were well above the national average and among the best

results in the school. In 2004 GCSE results were even better. All students achieved grades were from A* and B.

112. Teaching and learning are good overall. In Year 11 they are very good and there was an instance in Year 7 of excellent teaching and learning. In this lesson there was pace, humour, challenge and sheer enjoyment with plenty of activities to build students' confidence, skills and understanding. In their Blues pieces, Year 9 students expressed their feelings for the style in their own playing, responding sensitively to recorded music and what they learnt about the background of this music. One or two lessons were slower and lacked a little enthusiasm, but any instances of unsatisfactory behaviour were dealt with determinedly. Teachers are experts in their field and practising musicians. Consequently they are able to help students make good progress when playing by giving face-to-face advice, targeted exactly where it is needed. As a result students know how to create a good performance or composition. They are assessed regularly and know their strengths and weaknesses as they relate to National Curriculum levels. However, they do not take enough opportunities to discuss the quality of their work in class. In Year 11 students assess themselves and each other. They are maturely taking more responsibility within the lesson, rehearsing and composing in groups without the constant direction of the teacher.
113. Since the previous inspection there has been very good improvement. High standards are due to the unstinting efforts of the head of department whose leadership and management are very good. Students in all years enjoy music. Their attitudes are very good. They also enjoy learning to play instruments and take part in the groups with commitment and energy. According to the students, concerts and performances in the school are exciting occasions, enthusiastically supported by family and friends. Music makes very good provision for students' personal development, particularly through group and ensemble work, workshops, and concerts in and out of school.

Dance

Provision in dance is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are consistently very good.
- Attainment of students is above average and their achievement is very good.
- Students really enjoy the subject and have excellent relationships with their teachers.

Commentary

114. In 2003 GCSE results were above average. The 2004 results showed further improvement, with more students choosing the course. Present students in Years 10 and 11 are reaching standards that are well above average and their achievement is very good. Students enter the school with little or no experience of dance and build skills, knowledge and understanding through high quality teaching in Years 7 to 9. By the end of Year 9 students have achieved very well to attain standards that are well above the expectation. In a dance based on graffiti, they co-operated well in pairs, using a wide range of movement and used technical language accurately when giving feedback to others.
115. The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was always very good and sometimes excellent. Dance is taught by three specialist teachers and their strong expertise allows students to develop their movement skills at the same time as enjoying every aspect of the subject. Tasks are very challenging and teachers have high expectations. Students are thrilled when they achieve a particularly difficult technique or movement sequence. Extra-curricular activities provide many opportunities for students to see a variety of performers and to participate in performances themselves.
116. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. There is a shared commitment to improvement. Students are often involved in spiritual and cultural dances and the

contribution of the emotional aspect of dance to students' personal development is very high. Management is thorough and rigorous in monitoring of the work of the department to maintain its standards. Dance was not reported separately in the previous inspection

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High expectations and thorough planning lead to excellent teaching.
- Excellent teaching results in students reaching high standards in practical drama.
- There is the necessity to monitor written work thoroughly.

Commentary

117. Results in 2003 were below the national average, but improved significantly in 2004 with 80 per cent of students gaining grades A* to C. This improvement continues in the work of the present Year 11 where standards seen were well above average. Students achieve very well, learning new concepts and practising them enthusiastically in confident performances. Students listen to each other, co-operate with and trust each other and speak their opinions articulately.
118. Teaching and learning in lessons are consistently excellent. Students are enthused by the fast pace of well-organised activities in an ordered and harmonious environment. Lessons are rigorously planned to ensure learning is developed through timed and structured tasks. A range of challenging learning opportunities appeals to the different ways in which students learn. Teachers expect, and receive, nothing other than total concentration and involvement from the students. Learning is consolidated through the aims of the lessons being made clear to them and by students reviewing whether or not these have been achieved. Within the lessons, students give quick reminders of the concepts they have learned and important words and definitions are displayed so that learning is constantly reinforced. Teachers' explanations are clear so that there is no confusion. Students' confidence is increased by praise and by their work being displayed.
119. Leadership and management are very good. A detailed handbook shows thorough schemes of work including the use of ICT and awareness of literacy through constant insistence on students using correct terms and definitions. Analysis of examination results is used to determine how teaching can improve learning but monitoring of practice is not regular yet and marking is not always rigorous enough. The department has connections with the local theatre and workshops so that students work with actors and writers. There are regular performances throughout the year as well as competitions which students enter.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well.
- The amount of time allocated is low and no time is provided for the sixth form.
- Teaching is very good overall and characterised by very good organisation and planning.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Students enjoy the subject and have very good relationships with their teachers.
- Assessment procedures are very good but over-rigorous.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good.

Commentary

120. The school does not run GCSE, AS or A-Level courses. Over previous years teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate standards that are below and well below average. The inspection found these assessments to be inaccurate and that standards are average.
121. Students' standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are wide ranging but are mostly below national expectations. By reaching average standards at the end of Year 9, students have made very good progress. Students have two hours of physical education each week in Year 7 and in Years 8 and 9 only one hour. Students are achieving very well to reach average standards in the short time allocated. Students are taught dance for one hour each week for half the year. This has a positive influence on their performance. They develop very good movement skills and consolidate their knowledge of health and fitness. Girls warm up independently and effectively. Teachers emphasise this aspect at the start of each lesson. Further understanding is promoted in the health and fitness lessons. The majority of girls in Years 8 and 9 have good ball handling skills and are developing consistent footwork when playing netball. Students' analytical skills are not as well developed as their performance skills.
122. There was insufficient evidence to judge standards at the end of Year 11. Students in Year 10 attain average standards in hockey and football and above average in aerobics. As part of the very good extra-curricular programme, a few individual students and teams achieve high standards in county and national competitions in netball and athletics. These talented students are recognised by the department and benefit greatly from the many opportunities their teachers provide.
123. Teaching and learning are very good because students have positive attitudes and very good relationships with their teachers. Lessons have a very good pace allowing students maximum time on the activity. Teachers quickly improve students' performance skills by providing progressive skill practices that are based on comprehensive schemes of work. Teachers manage the behaviour of some very lively students well. Students' learning benefits from the teachers circulating and extending the more able and helping those students who find an activity difficult. However, in a few lessons insufficient opportunities are given for students to work independently on graded tasks that meet their individual needs.
124. The head of department provides very good leadership and management for the subject. Many areas including the informative notice boards, meticulous planning and the testing of students on entry have aided the very good improvement seen since the previous inspection.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business education

Provision in business education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results have been consistently well above average since the previous inspection.
- The newly appointed head of department has made good progress in resolving problems caused by a high turnover of staff last year.
- Teachers offer good support for students which ensures that they have a sound understanding of subject content.
- Teachers' planning does not yet include strategies to develop a wider range of business skills.

Commentary

125. Examination results in business studies GCSE in 2003 were well above average, with the high standard continuing into 2004 when almost half the students gained A* to B grades. Changes in staff in the last academic year have held back the achievement of students in the present Year 11, where standards at present as seen in work during the inspection are only average. There are gaps in their knowledge, for example, of independent enquiry, simulations, role-play and extended writing but ICT has been used well to extend and develop student understanding of business. They understand the basics of business studies but their analytical and decision making skills are undeveloped. The weaknesses have been recognised and the hard work and determination of teachers and students is already resulting in good achievement, which is putting students back on track to past standards.
126. Teaching is satisfactory and young inexperienced teachers are working very hard to establish good relationships with their students. They want all their students to do well, are very willing to help and have a good understanding of their subject. However, because they are inexperienced, they find it harder to exemplify their teaching in terms of current business practice, and to set students tasks which help them apply analytical techniques to current business problems. Teachers tend to concentrate on ensuring that the subject content of their course is covered and that students have adequate practice in examination techniques. However, they are less sure about developing more critical thinking in students. Individual lessons are not always planned well enough to give scope for the development of these skills. Many of these shortcomings are directly attributable to a recent high turnover of staff, of which students in Year 11 were critical. Learning is also satisfactory. Most students are keen to do well and have a positive attitude towards their studies. Most are mature and willing to make thoughtful and constructive responses to teacher questioning.
127. The school has responded very positively to these challenges and the newly appointed head of business studies has very good leadership and management skills. She has undertaken a thorough and rigorous review of the strengths and weaknesses of her department, which identifies all the issues raised above. She has started to introduce a range of changes to raise the challenge in teaching. For example, she has succeeded in getting the schools' examination awarding body to agree that the school can submit coursework which includes more challenging and realistic business tasks. Her planning and organisational skills are very good and she is developing a highly effective team of teachers. They work well together. The head of department is very well supported by the senior management team. Thus, both leadership and management are very good. Improvement since the previous inspection, especially in terms of offering a broad curriculum to include vocational courses for students in Years 10 and 11, has been good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship was inspected in depth and personal, social and health education sampled.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' standards are in line with national expectations and this represents a considerable achievement on the part of the school in a subject that is only newly establishing itself.
- The school has done well to ensure that provision for the delivery of the three strands of the subject is well balanced.
- Systematic assessment and reporting procedures have been established and are working well.

- There has been no monitoring of teaching and learning in citizenship yet, but this will take place during the coming year: this will ensure consistency of approach and is likely to lead to further improvement.
- There are as yet no portfolios or folders of students' work, which inhibits students from appreciating the coherence of a subject taught across different areas of the curriculum.
- No subject-specific professional development has been systematically provided for the considerable number of teachers involved in delivering citizenship education so there are likely to be gaps in teachers' understanding of the scope and ambition of citizenship as a curriculum subject.

Commentary

128. Attainment in citizenship is judged by the school to be broadly in line with national expectations and this represents satisfactory achievement by students. The school keeps careful records of students' attainment in each unit of work, as reported by the individual subject teachers and form-tutors responsible for delivering aspects of the programme. These records indicate that the attainment of students in this subject is broadly in line with their attainment in comparable subjects. However, during the inspection it was possible for only one designated citizenship lesson to be seen, no portfolios or folders of students' work were available for scrutiny, and little written work was seen in subject books and folders.
129. Insufficient evidence was available during the inspection for a judgement to be made concerning the quality of teaching and learning in citizenship. The one citizenship lesson that was observed was judged to be very good.
130. Designated subject content for citizenship is delivered mainly within the weekly personal, citizenship and health education lesson. Material not covered there is incorporated in the schemes of work for geography and religious education, or in the programme of tutorial activities. Skills of enquiry and communication are developed within different units of work whilst skills of partnership and responsibility are taken up within designated tutorial activities and through the working of the school council. There is further development of these skills for many students through their involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including mentoring and mediation schemes.
131. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Responsibility for the development of citizenship sits with the head of the humanities faculty. She has participated in professional development activities to ensure that she is fully aware of the requirements of the subject and recommendations as to best practice. She is entirely clear as to how the subject should develop and will undertake a rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning within citizenship during the current academic year. There are plans to institute and maintain portfolios of work for all students. The subject leader has only recently returned to the school after a maternity leave and this largely explains why development of citizenship has not developed further than it has.

Personal, social and health education

132. Four lessons were sampled from Years 7, 8, 9 and 11. Students achieved well in lessons and had an above average understanding of the facts and concepts that they were studying. Teaching and learning were good. In the best lessons students are actively involved in their learning. Leadership and management are good. There is a real commitment to high standards and ensuring the curriculum is relevant, challenging and interesting. The team of teachers is well led and those who have not taught the subject before are well prepared through a programme of good professional development. Resources are well-managed and used very effectively to support teaching. Visiting speakers are often brought in to provide an expert view on a topic.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art & Design	3	67	80	0	24	23.3	29.9
Biology	8	88	65	13	11	27.5	20.6
Business Studies	1	100	76	100	16	60.0	26.2
Chemistry	10	70	73	20	14	23.0	24.1
Communication studies	3	100	86	0	24	36.7	32.0
Drama	1	100	87	100	20	50.0	30.6
Economics	7	71	74	57	20	34.3	26.4
English Literature	4	100	86	0	19	30.0	30.2
French	4	75	78	25	19	27.5	27.6
Geography	1	100	74	0	20	20.0	26.5
German	2	50	82	0	19	10.0	28.9
History	4	100	81	25	20	32.5	28.6
Information Technology	15	100	67	67	11	47.3	21.4
Mathematics	12	83	62	33	17	31.7	22.1
Other languages	2	100	83	100	43	50.0	36.2
Other social studies	11	73	70	27	17	30.9	24.1
Physics	6	100	69	33	14	33.3	22.7
Sociology	9	89	72	22	18	34.4	25.4
Spanish	4	75	79	0	18	20.0	27.3

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 & Design	14	100	99	29	50	75.7	87.5
Biology	24	100	96	33	39	77.5	78.6
Business Studies	8	100	99	63	37	92.5	80.1
Chemistry	27	100	98	41	49	80.7	84.9
Communication studies	11	100	100	36	38	83.6	82.1
Dance	7	100	99	57	45	100.0	83.9
Drama	8	100	100	50	40	90.0	83.6
Economics	7	100	99	71	52	102.9	88.3
English Literature	20	100	100	65	47	96.0	86.5
French	2	100	99	0	52	80.0	87.6
Design and technology	5	100	98	60	35	96.0	77.9
Geography	8	100	99	50	45	82.5	84.0
German	2	100	99	50	48	90.0	84.8
History	9	100	99	44	45	84.4	84.6
Information Technology	14	100	96	64	25	97.1	69.5
Mathematics	17	100	97	82	56	101.2	88.8
Other languages	1	100	97	100	65	100.0	93.8
Other social studies	3	100	98	67	43	86.7	81.8
Physics	5	100	97	100	45	108.0	81.7
Sociology	27	100	98	70	44	100.7	83.6
Spanish	2	100	98	0	50	60.0	86.9

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	4	100	*	75	*	25	*

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English and French were inspected in depth. Spanish was sampled. A Year 13 lesson was observed. The students spoke with confidence and accuracy about the two Spanish artists they had been studying. They coped well with follow-up questions after their short presentations. The teaching, learning and achievement were very good. Students' speaking and listening skills were above average.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent relationships with students enable them to grow in confidence quickly.
- Groups are shared between two qualified teachers so that expertise and methods are diverse.
- Small teaching groups of committed students result in a good learning environment.
- Supportive resources raise standards.

Commentary

133. Students enter the sixth form with above average standards and leave with standards well above the average. In the 2003 examinations, 65 per cent achieved grades A or B. Standards are well above average and students achieve very well.
134. Teaching is consistently good. Most students are already known to the teachers and gain confidence quickly. They have ready access to individual help as teaching groups are small. Learning is very good
135. Students demonstrate a high level of commitment. They debate with enthusiasm and have the ability to read analytically. Written coursework is very good as structured lessons and effective homework prepare them for it and they use the computer both for professional presentation and for research. In the very good lessons teachers ensure that students become thoroughly familiar with texts through a wide variety of teaching strategies involving students in both group and individual work. Learning is supported by teachers suggesting reading lists to broaden the literary experience; providing resources to accompany activities, producing glossaries of useful vocabulary and organising theatre visits. In the occasional lesson where teaching is less effective, challenge and pace are not rigorous. Leadership and management are very good.
136. Leadership has formed an effective team to devise, test and share materials to support learning. Teaching is monitored, and results are analysed to inform practice. Groups are timetabled with two teachers so that students receive a wider view of the subject and consistency is assured despite the relatively high turnover of teachers. Improvement since the previous report has been very good because good results have been maintained and this year's AS level results are greatly improved too, indicating a possible upward trend.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

137. Literacy skills are promoted through a high level of discussion and debate. Students show maturity in their wide range of vocabulary and ability to voice their opinions confidently. Subjects have produced glossaries of terms and important vocabulary to help students in their written and spoken work.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good subject knowledge and very good linguistic skills of teachers raise standards.
- The results in external examinations are inconsistent.
- The effective use of French in lessons leads to above average attainment in listening and speaking.

Commentary

138. The results at ALevel in 2003 were below average. In 2004 there was a larger entry and results were much improved. The results at AS level in 2003 were below average. In 2004 results at AS level improved and two-thirds of students gained A and B grades. This represented good achievement. Standards in lessons in both Year 12 and 13 are overall in line with national expectations. Students' attainment in listening and speaking is above average, however. In Year 12 there is a wide range of ability. Some students are very competent orally and cope well with familiar topics and situations. Other Year 12 students display considerable gaps in their knowledge of basic grammar and vocabulary and a few students are very reticent about speaking. Year 13 students produce good written and spoken work within the context of the A-Level syllabus. Students make good progress from Year 12 to 13 in terms of vocabulary and grammar acquisition and the development of communication skills.
139. Teaching and learning are generally good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and very good linguistic skills, which play a central role in raising standards. Students are well motivated, hard working and keen to express their personal opinions about key issues. The Year 13 students find the literature component of the course too demanding. Students speak very positively about the positive impact on their learning by the French assistant.
140. The leadership and management of the subject are good. There is a good scheme of work and the vision for the subject is clear. The improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory, since teaching and learning and achievement in lessons have improved, but results in examinations are inconsistent.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average at AS and A2 levels.
- Students are most conscientious and highly motivated.
- Short-term assessment processes ensure the good progress of all students.

Commentary

141. The 2003 examination results were well above average at both the AS and A2 levels. The standard of work seen in students' lessons and books is also well above average and the students' achievements are very good in all modules at both levels. At AS and A2 level, students study either the statistics or mechanics module in addition to 'pure mathematics' and the 'decisions' module. More students have chosen the statistics option. A high number of students choose to study mathematics at AS level. Some select the course as an additional AS course but many of these Year 12 students continue studying mathematics to A-Level. A small group of students are studying further mathematics. In addition to the ALevel groups, there is also a GCSE re-sit group for students who did not achieve grade C last year.

142. The A-Level students clearly enjoy mathematics and the most confident will enter into academic conference, demonstrating their increasing familiarity with the language of mathematics and their higher level thinking skills, which enable them to cope with abstract mathematics. Other A-Level students are more reserved but where teaching is good, they are given much encouragement. The current Year 13 students are on track to achieve their target grades of A or B. The GCSE group appreciates the additional attention they receive. They are gaining in confidence and all are expected to gain at least grade C next year.
143. At AS, A2 and GCSE level, the standard of teaching is mainly good and none is less than satisfactory. Likewise, the relationship between teachers and students is mainly very good. In most lessons, teachers share their love of mathematics with the students and they elicit the students' logical thought processes. They assess the students' level of understanding continuously and they adjust their teaching accordingly. Most teachers also provide opportunities for students to work collaboratively and to develop independent study skills to prepare them for higher education.
144. The curriculum leader works closely with the other teachers and is tracking the progress of the students to ensure that they are well prepared to secure good grades next year. Planning for the future development of the A/AS level courses has been carefully considered. The pupils most likely to succeed with the intellectual demands of AS/A-Level mathematics are identified early and encouraged to study the subject beyond GCSE. The curriculum leader and the team of talented and dedicated teachers are determined to maintain the high number of students studying mathematics in the sixth form and to ensure they continue to achieve high standards. In this respect, the new target setting and progress tracking systems that are about to be introduced will be of support to students and teachers.

Mathematics across the curriculum

145. Students' competence in mathematics across the curriculum is good. The mathematics faculty's initiative to address the application of mathematics across the curriculum has been as effective in the sixth form as it has been in the main school. The head of department carried out an audit of other subjects to discover the mathematics content of the schemes of work of other subjects and has provided training to explain preferred teaching methods.

SCIENCE

Physics was the focus for this inspection. Biology, chemistry were sampled. Teaching in both the biology and chemistry lessons was satisfactory with the students achieving as well as expected.

Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching is very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Standards at A-Level are well above average and students have a very positive attitude towards their learning.

Commentary

146. Advanced level results in 2003 were well above average, with all students attaining an A or B grade. Moreover, in 2004 all students reached pass level with two-thirds at the higher grades. The number of students has fluctuated in recent years and the uptake has been low. Retention into Year 13 is high with all students completing the course. In work seen, standards in both years are above expectations and students achieve well. Students have a very positive attitude to their studies. They persevere when set challenging tasks. For example, a Year 13

group linked some aspects of their work on Newton's Universal Law of Gravitation to Year 12 work on measuring the distances to stars.

147. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are enthusiastic and have a very secure knowledge and understanding of their subject. Planning is detailed with extensive practical work and opportunities for ICT clearly identified in lesson documentation and schemes of work. Test and examination results are carefully analysed and, as a result, students are given regular feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. The department is currently introducing an assessment system by which students evaluate and support each other's progress.
148. Leadership and management are very good and promote close monitoring of both teacher and student performance. Although there are only two students in Year 12, a comprehensive plan has been introduced to encourage more students to choose the subject. The department has made good improvement since the previous inspection and standards are now much higher.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

149. ICT was not inspected in depth. A Year 12 AS class was sampled and the lesson was good. Students were making good progress in their understanding of the design and practical applications of templates in word processing. In the practical session they used their knowledge to design a template to print a page of business cards. Students were enjoying the lesson and appreciated the good personal help they received from the teacher.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

150. Students have satisfactory access to computers in the sixth form and library for private study. However, use of ICT in lessons is underdeveloped because of a shortage of computers in the school. In geography students use spreadsheets to model changes in land use. Students taking languages use the Internet for research. Students make good use of word processing when writing their coursework.

HUMANITIES

History was the focus subject and inspected in depth. Two lessons of government and politics were sampled. Standards were well above average and students discussed a range of issues in a most articulate fashion. They debated legitimacy and also whether the law may ever be broken in the name of justice, defending their views with confidence. Teaching and learning were very good and students demonstrated a profound interest in the subject matter. Geography was also sampled. Provision is satisfactory. Standards seen during the inspection were above average as a direct result of the good teaching, which develops independent learning through use of imaginative and innovative teaching strategies. One lesson of psychology was sampled where the teaching was good with students achieving well.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at A-Level are well above average.
- Teaching is very good and teachers demonstrate very secure knowledge of their subject.
- Leadership is excellent and teachers produce thought-provoking resources to motivate their students.

Commentary

151. A-Level results in 2003 were above average and in 2004, there was an increase in the percentage of students attaining at A and B, with nearly two-thirds reaching the higher grades. Standards of work seen during the inspection mirror this performance and are well above average. Most students enjoy the cut and thrust of historical debate and speak with confidence about attitudes towards poverty in early 19th century England, for example. Similarly, achievement is very good and students are developing into highly competent historians, who see the past in shades of grey and who have a profound background knowledge of the topics under consideration.
152. Teachers are very well qualified and share a passion for their subject. Students enjoy and benefit from the sophisticated questioning techniques in lessons and are given every opportunity to express their own views and to challenge the opinions of others. Students adopt a most mature attitude to their studies and speak warmly of the talents, the skills and the support of their teachers. Teaching and learning are very good overall and in a quarter of lessons they are excellent.
153. Leadership is excellent and teachers work long and hard to write notes and worksheets of the highest quality which are valued highly by their students. There is a clear vision for development and, because staff operate very effectively as a team and because history is a popular choice in the sixth form, the department is well placed for continued success. Management of the department is very good, and improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attainment is well above average and their achievement is good.
- The use of innovative teaching strategies has a very successful impact upon learning.
- Developmental marking is not consistently used alongside assessment information to set targets to help students learn.
- The profile of the subject is very high in the school due to the enjoyment of the teaching and the success of the learning.
- Schemes of work do not include sufficient detail of teaching strategies, resources and assessment.
- The teamwork and collaborative planning and development of enterprise education have a positive impact on the achievement of students.
- ICT use in lessons is limited by lack of resources and training of staff.

Commentary

154. In 2003 A-Level results were very good and continued a rising trend. The proportion of students attaining A and B grades was above the school and national average. In 2004 the results were well above average and continued the cycle of improving and successful results. Students' work seen during the inspection indicates above average attainment in Years 12 and 13 and good achievement, based on their success at GCSE. Higher attaining students are confident and articulate and extend their thinking beyond the initial topic. The use of innovative group exercises involving the development of independent skills has had a very positive impact upon standards.
155. Students in both years have a sound understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject. Teaching is very good and students of all abilities learn well as a direct result. Relationships are very good and students are prepared to ask for help and clarification. Teachers have a high level of subject expertise and encourage independent thinking amongst the girls. The inclusion of contemporary issues such as terrorism and globalisation in the teaching is a strength as it interests and motivates students to learn. The content of the work

ensures students face up to difficult moral and social issues in society that contributes significantly to their personal development. Department systems for monitoring student progress have been developed. However, the assessment systems are not fully integrated with target setting and student feedback to enhance individual student achievement and support their development. Resources used in lessons are mostly videos, handouts and textbooks. This restricts the development of research skills for the girls. The limited use of computers provides insufficient opportunities for independent learning. Students' attitudes are very good working well together in lessons. There is a very good level of debate in all lessons as teachers challenge the students to think through sociological theory and apply their ideas to reality.

156. The leadership and management of the department are good with a clear direction for the subject. The development of schemes of work to include differentiation, resources and assessment procedures would enhance the work of the department and achievement of students. The teachers work well together and complement one another in their areas of subject expertise. Sociology was not reported separately at the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Current standards are well above average.
- Project work show good development of students' own ideas.
- Students have positive and mature attitudes with very good independent learning skills.

Commentary

157. A-Level results in 2003 were well above average with all students gaining the higher grades. Results in 2004 show a similar well above average profile. Standards seen are well above average and represent very good achievement as a result of good planning and very good teaching. Course retention rates are very good. Achievement is very good overall, with many students joining the course with either a GCSE qualification in Graphic Products or Resistant Materials Technology, and all having to learn new skills of study and learning. Students have a good understanding of modern design and manufacture and are particularly good at research. Students are very articulate and designing is strongly individual, yet draws on the students' knowledge of the work of major designers and styles. Research skills are strongly developed and are a very good example of how drawing, measurement and excellent observational skills can make a significant contribution to the design process.
158. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Carefully prepared resources, clearly stated aims and objectives and well communicated subject knowledge result in very effective learning. Challenging questions are asked in lessons and the classroom atmosphere created by the teachers gives the students the confidence to respond well to these challenges. A major strength is the positive, articulate and mature attitude of the students, creating confident, independent learners. The department's ICT provision for this course is inadequate.
159. The department and subject are very well led and managed. The course team have a wide range of expertise and experience and students benefit from the range of expertise, opinion and interests. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, particularly in relation to improved standards and achievement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

160. Dance was inspected in depth and drama and art and design were sampled. Drama is very good in the sixth form. Students achieve very well and standards are well above average. The teaching seen was excellent, affording the students opportunities to work independently and make informed decisions. In two lessons of art and design, teaching was either good or very good, leading to students learning well and achieving highly.

Dance

Provision in dance is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Years 12 and 13 are well above the national average and reflect students' results in previous years.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Very good teaching is characterised by a very high level of subject expertise.
- Students are totally committed to the subject and their attitudes are very positive.
- Individual help and guidance given to students assist their very good progress.
- A few lessons are taken in temporary classrooms which have insufficient space to demonstrate the theoretical aspects of the course.

Commentary

161. Results in AS and ALevel examinations have been well above national averages over time. When comparing dance to other subjects in the school dance is always at the top or very close to it. Present students are working to well above average standards and their achievement is very good. Most students are extending their knowledge and increasing their practical expertise from GCSE dance. Two students in Year 12 are new to the school and did not study dance at GCSE. Their confidence and understanding have improved significantly in the short time since joining the AS course. Students are prepared to **practise** and repeat movements to achieve technical precision and accuracy. They are totally committed to the subject and spend much time in the department, working independently and attending extra activities including theatre visits, dance company visits and taking part in performances. There are 13 students in Year 12 this year. This illustrates the increasing numbers of students who wish to continue with the subject in Years 12 and 13.
162. The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was very good. Teachers have excellent subject expertise and lead technique sessions that give students a clear visual image and feeling for their movements. Teachers have high expectations and there is an insistence on high standards. Students learn very well because theory is always connected to practice and teachers use appropriate technical language throughout their teaching. In two lessons each week when students are taught in temporary huts, their learning is hindered because the lack of space does not allow them to move sufficiently. Students' very positive attitudes and the very good relationships they have with their teachers significantly help their learning. There is some material from the Internet in students' files but resources for ICT are not yet fully developed. Assessment and feedback are always clear to help improve students' practical work. Students find these processes and the very thorough marking of their written work helpful and informative.
163. The head of department provides very good leadership and management for a strong team of teachers. The department has successfully established dance as an enjoyable and creative experience, which has a major impact on the life and work of all students in the school. Dance was not inspected separately at the previous inspection.

BUSINESS

Business education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Highly effective leadership and management are ensuring that high standards and achievement are being maintained.
- Students respond very well to the high expectations of their teachers.
- Business links are used well to ensure that students on vocational courses learn about local businesses.
- Accommodation is poor which makes it harder for students to learn.
- Coursework is used well on vocational courses to develop a better understanding of real business issues.

Commentary

164. A-Level business results have continued to be very good and in 2004 nearly 60 per cent of those taking the examination achieved A and B grades. Since the previous inspection results have always been well above national expectations. Students in Year 13 gained excellent AS grades and if they maintain this standard results in 2005 will be even better than they have been in the past. The school also offers vocational courses at both advanced and intermediate level. Students taking these courses also do well and their results exceed national expectations. Therefore, both standards and achievement are very good.
165. During the inspection students showed a very good understanding of business concepts and the ability to apply these to different business contexts. Their discussion of business ideas was fluent and they were very confident in dealing with the quantitative aspects of the subject. For those taking vocational courses coursework gives opportunities to work with local businesses. These include presentations of marketing proposals by students in Year 13 to staff from a local branch of a national company, and interviews by GNVQ students to establish what running your own business is actually like. The quality of work seen was very good especially in terms of dealing with the numerical demands of the subject which many students often find difficult.
166. Teaching is very well planned and organised. Students are given extensive notes supported by appropriate stimulus material. Teachers show very good skills in explaining difficult topics such as investment appraisal. The assessment of coursework is very thorough. Assignments are well designed to cover the assessment criteria and students are given detailed guidance to help them achieve the higher grades.
167. The response of students to this very good teaching is equally positive. They clearly enjoy these subjects, work very hard and show great determination to be successful. They have good relationships with their teachers and are also very supportive of each other in ensuring that everyone understands the most demanding topics. Learning is very good.
168. Leadership and management of business education are very good. Thorough planning and critical self review ensure that there is a constant drive to improve further standards that are already very good. Accommodation, however, though recently improved through funding linked to the school's specialist status, is poor. Many lessons take place in old dilapidated temporary buildings. Students complain that they are cold in winter making learning more difficult. Moreover there are only two specialist rooms, which make it impossible for all lessons to take place in an appropriate business environment.
169. It has been hard for the school to market successfully advanced vocational business courses, and, this year there is no AVCE in Year 12. On the other hand unexpected demand has lead

to the provision of a GNVQ business class. Opportunities for these students to progress will be limited if there is no further vocational provision.

170. The provision of business education has long been a strength of this school and there has been very good improvement since the previous inspection, especially in terms of the number of students achieving the highest grades.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

172. Health and social care was sampled. This course provides lower ability students with a challenging vocationally linked course. Students attain average standards that meet course requirements. Their good achievement is directly attributable to good teaching, which helps students to become confident independent learners.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Personal, social and health education

Two lessons were sampled.

173. The well-planned curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to study contemporary issues. The school regularly consults students about the content of lessons and as a result, for example, further work on business projects is being planned. Leadership and management are good. There is a real commitment to high standards and ensuring the curriculum is relevant, challenging and interesting. The head of department is looking for ways of introducing further links with industry, and business to help students make decisions about business both in and out of school. Resources are well-managed and used very effectively to support teaching.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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