

INSPECTION REPORT

Blackfen School for Girls

Bexley

LEA Area: Bexley

Unique Reference Number: 101465

Inspection Number: 180311

Head-Teacher: Mr R A Abo-Henriksen

Reporting inspector: Mr David M Bain
3258

Dates of inspection: 01/11/1999 - 05/11/1999

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern (Non-selective)
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Blackfen Road Sidcup Kent DA15 9NU
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Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Carol Townsend
Date of previous inspection:	11 th – 15 th October 1993

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Subject responsibilities

Psychology
Law
Key stage 4
6th form

English
Special educational needs

Geography
Sociology
Lifeskills
Equal opportunities
History
Religious education

Mathematics
Science
Design and technology
Physical education
Information technology
Modern foreign languages
Music
Art
Vocational education
GNVQ
Business studies

Aspect responsibilities

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Leadership and management
Efficiency of the school
Attitudes, behaviour and
personal development
Attendance
Partnership with parents and the
community
Accommodation and learning
resources
Teaching

Curriculum and assessment
Staffing

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social
and cultural development
Support, guidance and pupils'
welfare

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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- It has developed a strong ethos based upon working hard and enjoying learning.
- It encourages and achieves high standards, with pupils making good progress in all years.
- Key stage 3 and GCSE results are well above average compared to similar schools and, in some cases, are good in comparison to all schools.
- Post 16, results in GNVQ and NVQ are good and A level performance is improving.
- Teaching is good and particularly strong in the sixth form.
- The school is extremely well led by the head and governors, with a strong focus on raising standards and a commitment to continuous improvement.
- Pupils attend regularly, behave well and are provided with good support and guidance throughout the school.
- Provision for pupils' moral, social and personal development is very good.
- Links with the community, including business, are excellent.
- The school makes excellent use of its limited resources.
- Financial management and control are excellent.
- The quality of support staff is excellent, as exemplified by the efficient and welcoming school office.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Monitoring of teaching and learning by middle managers tends to be descriptive rather than evaluative.
- II. Some teaching is too structured, pays too little regard to the needs of individual pupils and restricts attainment, particularly in the middle of key stage 3.
- III. Some aspects related to the quality of pupils' life in school could be improved, including, for example, lunchtime arrangements and access to storage for bags and coats. The unsatisfactory nature of some accommodation has impeded progress in addressing some of these concerns.
- IV. The attainment of pupils in information and communication technology is poor.

Blackfen School for Girls is a very good school with some outstanding features. The many significant strengths of the school considerably outweigh the few weaknesses, which have all already been identified by the school. They will form the basis of the governors' action plan, which will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection in 1993. The overall quality of teaching has improved significantly and standards have risen. There is a strong emphasis on attainment and progress with very good use made of targets for improvement. The school is well placed to sustain its developments.

- The school has tackled the key issues contained in the last report vigorously. It has been particularly successful in addressing the weaknesses in attainment and management within mathematics. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning have been introduced and arrangements for collective worship have improved. There has been a substantial programme of new building to enhance the accommodation, although it still has significant shortcomings. The drainage problems have been addressed.

• **Standards in subjects**

The following table shows standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds in national tests, GCSE and A/AS-level examinations in 1999:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	Key	
			<i>well above average</i>	<i>A</i>
			<i>above average</i>	<i>B</i>
			<i>average</i>	<i>C</i>
			<i>below average</i>	<i>D</i>
			<i>well below average</i>	<i>E</i>
Key Stage 3 Test	C	A		
GCSE Examinations	C	A		
A/AS – levels	D	N/A		

Blackfen is a secondary modern school in an LEA where approximately a quarter of pupils attend grammar schools. In key stage 3 tests, overall results in English are above the national average for all maintained schools with the proportion achieving level 5 or better well above the national average. Results in mathematics have improved and are now broadly in line with the national average. Whilst overall results in science dropped below the national average in 1999, the proportion achieving level 5 or more remained close to the average.

Results overall at GCSE have shown a substantial improvement over the last few years. The proportion attaining 5+A*-C grades is above the national average and well above that for similar schools, whilst almost all girls achieve 5+A*-G, well above the national average for all schools. In 1999, results were well above the national averages in art and design, English literature, French, home economics, textiles, child care, music and religious education and above or close to the national average in English language, geography and science. Results in mathematics, which had been very low, are now approaching national averages.

At A level the pass rate rose to over 93%. Whilst the average point score obtained remains below the national average, this is because most candidates sit two rather than three A levels, often alongside another qualification. Results are outstanding in art and all passed in biology, English literature, geography, history, psychology and sociology. Good results are also attained in GNVQ health and social care, and leisure and tourism and in various business related NVQs.

In lessons observed and from work sampled, attainment in most subjects met national expectations at key stage 3. At key stage 4, it was above average in art, dance, food technology, history, textiles and in many classes in French and English. Post 16 it was above average in most GNVQ work, art and dance. Attainment was generally below average in lower sets in both mathematics and key stage 4 science as expected, some games lessons within physical education and in ICT across the school.

• **Quality of teaching**

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	Art, English, food technology, history, mathematics, music, RE, textiles	
Years 10-11	Good	Art, dance, English, food technology, French, geography, history, life skills, music, PE, RE, textiles	ICT
Sixth form	Very good	Art, business education, dance, English, GNVQ courses, history, law, life skills, PE, psychology, RE, sociology	
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

There is a high proportion of good teaching across the curriculum. 95% of the teaching seen was at least satisfactory with 62% good or very good. These are very pleasing figures. The proportion of very good teaching increases as pupils move up the school, with pupils in years 7, 11, 12 and 13 enjoying a higher proportion of good teaching than other years. There is least good teaching in year 8. There is some skilled and sensitive teaching of pupils with special educational needs.

Information technology at key stage 4 was the only subject where teaching was generally unsatisfactory with insufficient account taken of matching activities to the abilities of the whole class.

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that strengths outweigh any weaknesses

• **Other aspects of the school**

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Very good; pupils are courteous to peers, teachers and other adults.
Attendance	Good, with very little unauthorised absence.
Ethos*	Very good; attitudes to learning are very positive and relationships very good. The pupils are a strength of the school. There is a caring ethos and pupils feel pride in their school. All connected to the school are committed to achieving high standards.
Leadership and management	Very strong and effective. The head, senior managers and governors have a clear vision for the school. They provide purposeful leadership. Middle managers are effective, but need to refine their evaluative skills when monitoring teaching and learning.
Curriculum	Good, although some pupils do not study technology in key stage 4 and not all study religion in the sixth form. There are extensive extra-curricular opportunities, including a wide range of trips and school journeys. Assessment is very good in key stage 4 and post 16.

Pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good. Support is well planned and carefully implemented to give pupils good access to the whole curriculum.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Spiritual development is satisfactory, although not all pupils have a daily act of worship. Moral and social development are very good. Cultural development is good. All are supported across the curriculum.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Good overall; teaching staff are well qualified, except in ICT and well deployed; support staff are excellent. Learning resources are satisfactory, although continued development in ICT is required. The library is an attractive new resource. Accommodation has greatly improved, but remains unsatisfactory. It is very well used.
Value for money	Financial planning and control and school administration are excellent. The school provides very good value for money. Pupils make good progress throughout the school.

**Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.*

The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the school

- V. It enables all girls to achieve high standards and develop self confidence
- VI. It has very high expectations of all girls
- VII. It has a positive ethos and values girls as individuals, the way they look and behave
- VIII. It gives a high standard of individual care to girls and nurtures the less confident
- IX. It keeps parents well informed about the school and their daughters' progress
- X. It encourages parents to become involved in the school
- XI. It is easy to raise concerns with the school

What some parents are not happy about

- XII. Too much homework is set in years 10 and 11
- XIII. Provision for girls at break and lunchtime
- XIV. A lack of basic amenities for hanging coats

Inspectors' judgements support parents' positive views of the school. Evidence observed supports the concerns expressed about basic amenities and provision outside lesson times; points also raised by pupils. The amount of homework set in years 10 and 11 is appropriate, but the lack of a homework timetable and pupils' enthusiasm leads to some girls working for excessive hours some evenings. Older pupils regretted that more had not been required of them at key stage 3.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

To raise attainment further the governors, head and staff should:

		References in paragraphs
1.	review the monitoring of teaching and learning and provide appropriate support and training to middle managers to refine their skills in becoming more evaluative rather than descriptive	42, 92-94, 159, 190, 197, 241
2.	refine teaching strategies, particularly in years 8 and 9, to address the needs of individual pupils and provide more opportunities for pupils to take control of their own learning, display initiative and be creative	25, 37, 40, 55, 60, 98, 125, 130, 151, 185, 189, 195, 206, 207, 217, 229
3.	continue to address the various concerns of pupils, and their parents, which relate to the quality of pupils' social, recreational and working life in school, including taking all possible measures to improve accommodation in order to meet the needs of pupils.	81, 98, 106, 286

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

4.	continue the development of information and communication technology and in particular the programme of staff training in order to raise standards across the curriculum	24, 33, 39, 53, 132, 139, 211-220
5.	meet statutory requirements for design technology at key stage 4,	58, 66, 73, 100,

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. Blackfen is an above average size secondary modern school of 1122 girls in Blendon and Penhill ward, a largely residential suburban area in the south of the London Borough of Bexley. The school recruits from approximately 40 primary schools with most pupils living in Bexley, although a minority come from Greenwich. Residents in the area surrounding the school enjoy relatively favourable social circumstances. According to the 1991 census the proportion of children living in overcrowded households was well below average and the proportion of children living in households of high social class was above average, although the proportion of adults with higher education was lower than average. However, given the presence of selective and independent schools in the borough, it does not follow that the school's population reflects fully that of the surrounding area. Currently around 10% of pupils are entitled to free school meals; a figure which is below the national average for modern schools, although at the lower end of the range which is broadly average for all schools. About 12% of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds with a higher than average number, 94, coming from families where a language other than English is spoken at home. The most frequently spoken languages are Turkish, Punjabi, Bengali and Gudjurati, although a range of other languages are spoken.

2. The school was opened in 1935 for up to 500 boys and girls, and became a girls school in 1954. It grew steadily. Increased popularity since 1992 has resulted in a rapid expansion from less than 5 form entry, initially to 6 and then to 7 form entry in the current years 7 and 8. In 1999 there were over 350 first choice applicants for 210 places. At the same time the school has developed a sixth form, which now contains 170 students, including 70% of last year's year 11. The roll has risen by over a 100 in the last year and despite significant building programmes accommodation is very stretched. The vast majority of pupils from year 11 continue their education beyond 16, with a small number seeking employment or training. However, up until now about half year 12 and half of year 13 have sought employment at the end of their respective years. The changing nature of the sixth form may alter these proportions in future.

3. According to the most recent figures, 1998, Bexley educates 25% of its pupils in secondary modern, 21% in grammar and 54% in comprehensive schools. Few pupils attending Blackfen gain 11+ test scores which would place them in the top quartile of the ability range within Bexley. The LEA defines about 16% of pupils as having special educational needs, verbal reasoning scores below 85. Only 10 pupils have statements of special educational needs, below the national average. About three-quarters of those on the SEN register are at the first two stages with most requiring mainly help with literacy. The majority with individual education plans, have specific or moderate learning difficulties. The average verbal reasoning (VR) scores for each year group vary, with the current year 7 having a higher average of around 100. Whilst the intake is clearly that of a secondary modern with few pupils with high VR scores, the proportion with very low scores, who may have difficulty in accessing the full curriculum, is also less than might be expected in a modern or a comprehensive school. In the current year 7, whilst only 32 attained level 5 in key stage 2 English, only 29 attained below level 4 out of 210 pupils. Thus, only 15% had achieved above the nationally expected level and only 15% below.

4. The school has a clear set of aims which place a heavy emphasis upon the personal development of pupils, whilst stressing high standards and partnership. They aim to help students to "acquire, knowledge, skills and practical abilities...", "to develop qualities of mind, body, spirit, feeling and imagination...", "to develop a critical appreciation of human achievement in all fields...", "to acquire understanding and respect for religious and moral values...", "to prepare for adult life...", and "to develop self-awareness and self-respect...". The school also places emphasis upon its equal opportunities policy, that "every pupil has, in all interactions with others, the right to be seen, treated and valued on her individual merits, free of any prejudice based upon assumptions about gender, race, class or disability". The school's development plan, all documentation and the actions of staff support what are described in the school's prospectus as its essential features. "These are:

- a commitment to high standards of discipline, appearance and courtesy;
- high expectations of girls in terms of their work, general progress and academic achievement;
- a caring pastoral system providing guidance and support for all pupils;

- a close partnership between parents, pupils and the school.”

Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

6.	Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	n/a	179	179

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	152	116	89
	Total	152	116	89
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	85 (74)	65 (58)	50 (58)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	20 (30)	29 (22)	4 (15)
	National	27.6 (35)	37.7 (36)	23.9 (27)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	142	126	86
	Total	142	126	86
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	79 (76)	70 (80)	48 (n/a)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	30 (32)	30 (38)	3 (n/a)
	National	31 (31)	37.3 (37)	29.3 (31)

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

7.	Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	n/a	174	174

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	93	171	173
	Total	93	171	173
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	53.4 (50)	98.6 (97)	99.4 (99)
	National	45.3 (44.6)	88.6 (89.8)	94.1 (95.2)

¹ Percentage in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

² Percentage in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Attainment in the Sixth Form³

8. Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examination in the latest reporting year:

Year	Male	Female	Total
1999	n/a	26	26

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	n/a	13 (11.1)	13 (11.1)	n/a	4.9 (2.5)	4.9 (2.5)
National	17.7	18.1 (n/a)	17.9 (17.6)	2.7 (n/a)	2.8 (n/a)	2.8 (2.8)

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of <i>such students</i> who achieved these qualifications:	School	Number	% Success rate
		2 *	100
	National		n/a (79.1)

- * 13 students were entered for level 2 GNVQ, also with 100% success rate

Attendance

9. Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:	Authorised	School	%
	Absence	National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised	School	0.1
	Absence	National comparative data	1.1

Exclusions

10. Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:	Number
Fixed period	16
Permanent	0

Quality of teaching

11. Percentage of teaching observed which is:	%
Very good or better	17.5
Satisfactory or better	95.3
Less than satisfactory	4.7

³ Percentage in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

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- **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

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- **EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL**

- **Attainment and progress**

12. Over the six years since the last inspection there has been a substantial improvement in standards of attainment. At GCSE in 1993, 42.5% of pupils achieved 5+ A*-C grades, which was a significant improvement on the 31.8% of the previous year. Results were reported as "outstanding in science, good in English, but unsatisfactory in mathematics," and above national averages for similar schools in all other subjects. No results were reported for key stage 3 and only examinations in aspects of business education in the sixth form. In lessons, standards in English were reported as good, particularly at key stage 3, rarely more than satisfactory in mathematics, and improving as pupils progressed through the school in science.

1. Blackfen is a secondary modern school in an LEA where approximately a quarter of pupils attend grammar schools. As a result, few pupils in the school arrive having achieved high verbal reasoning scores in national tests at age 11 or having obtained above average results in key stage 2 tests.

13. **Key Stage 3**

14. In 1999, aggregated results for national curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of key stage 3 show pupils attaining broadly in line with the national average for all maintained, mainstream schools and above the average for secondary modern schools. Results in English are particularly pleasing. In 1999, the average point score achieved was above the national average for all schools and well above that for modern schools. 84% of pupils attained level 5 or above, compared to 74% in 1998. This is well above the national average for all schools and very high in comparison with other modern schools. The proportion attaining level 6 or above, 20%, is broadly in line with the national average for all schools and above average for modern schools.

15. Results in mathematics have improved over the last two years. In 1999, the average point score and proportion attaining level 5 or above, 63%, were both broadly in line with the national average for all schools and above the average for modern schools. Whilst the proportion attaining level 6 or above rose to 29%, higher than in English, this was below the national average for all schools, although above average for modern schools. However, the proportion attaining level 6 was in line with national averages; a laudable achievement for a secondary modern school. Results in science, however, were not as good as those achieved in 1998. The average point score, which was in line with the national average and above average for modern schools in 1998, was, in 1999, below the national average and in line with that for modern schools. However, the proportion achieving level 5 or better, although it fell from 58% in 1998 to 49%, remained in line with the national average and above average for modern schools. It was the proportion that attained level 6, only 4%, where the major change from 1998 occurred. This was well below the national average and below that for modern schools.

16. Teacher assessment in English, mathematics and science was broadly in line with the levels achieved in tests. Teacher assessment in other subjects indicated that over four-fifths of pupils were attaining level 5 or above in design technology, geography and IT, over half in history and about a third in French. However, as these results are not moderated the variation between subjects may not be totally reliable.

13.

Key Stage 4

17. GCSE results show a substantial and sustained improvement over time. The average total point score attained by pupils, based upon one point for grade G to 8 points for an A*, has shown a rising trend, broadly in line with the rising trend nationally. Results overall have been close to the national average for both girls and all pupils and well above average in comparison with similar schools. The proportion of pupils attaining 5+A*-C has also risen. It remained fairly constant, between 39-43%, from 1993 to 1997, then rose significantly to 50% in 1998 and to 53.4% in 1999, compared to 44.6% nationally for maintained schools in 1998 and 45.3%

in 1999. The 1999 results match almost exactly the national figures for all girls, (including those in independent schools) 53.2%, despite being a secondary modern school. Results at 5+A*-C are above the national average for all schools and well above when compared to similar schools. The proportion of pupils attaining 5+A*-G grades has consistently been well above the national average both for all maintained schools and for modern schools. In 1999, 98.6% compared to 88.4% nationally. The school is to be commended for its policy of successfully entering almost all pupils for a number of GCSE examinations. In 1999, 61% of examinations entered were passed at grades A*-C, with an average of 5.1 higher grades obtained by each pupil.

1. Results in individual subjects vary, but have been well above national averages over the last two years in art and design, English literature, French, other languages, home economics, textiles and music; in history in 1998, and child care and short course religious studies in 1999. They have been around, and sometimes above, the national average in business studies (in 1999), science, design technology (in 1998), English language and geography. Results in mathematics, which had been consistently low, rising from 20% in 1993 to only 24.3% in 1998, improved substantially to 37.2% in 1999, although this remains below the national average of 45%.

19. When compared to results in other Bexley schools, a higher proportion of pupils at Blackfen achieve 5+A*-C than in all other schools except for the four grammar schools and one Roman Catholic comprehensive school. In the latter the proportion is slightly higher than at Blackfen. The proportion achieving 5+A*-C is consistently well above the Bexley average for non-selective schools, and in some years above the average for all Bexley pupils including those in grammar schools. Whilst the proportion achieving 5+A*-C rose by 76% in Bexley overall between 1989 and 1998, it rose by 238% in Blackfen.

20. When the ability of pupils is taken into account the results achieved in Blackfen are impressive. In 1999 an exceptional proportion achieved the highest grades in English, English literature, art and design, French, religious studies, music, science and history. The school has already surpassed its target for the year 2000 of attaining 52% 5+A*-C, although must still strive to reach its average point score target of 42.6.

18. **Post 16**

21. The changing nature of the sixth form and small entry in many subjects makes comparisons with national figures unreliable. However, there are clear indications that results are improving. For the first time in 1998 the school's value added score showed students doing better at A level than predicted by their GCSE results. The A level pass rate rose from 82% in 1998 to 93.4% in 1999. Whilst the average point score for candidates entered for less than two A levels has remained close to the national average, that for candidates entered for two or more A levels remains well below the national average, 13 in 1999 compared to 17.6 nationally in 1998. However, this is misleading as out of the 16 entered for two or more subjects 11 entered only two, often with an NVQ or other vocational course, whilst nationally the majority enter three subjects. Over all candidates, the average score per A level was 5.2. In 1999, every candidate entered achieved a grade in art, biology, English literature, geography, history, psychology and sociology. Results were outstanding in art where all 14 entered achieved grades A-C and half of them grade A.

22. Candidates were also entered for GNVQ leisure and tourism at foundation and intermediate levels, and health and social care at intermediate and advanced levels. In 1999, all achieved qualifications, which is significantly better than results nationally. Students also entered a range of NVQs in business related subjects at both levels 1 and 2, including text processing, word processing, audio, communication, shorthand and administration. Results were very good, except for higher speeds in shorthand. A number of students also resat GCSE mathematics and English in order to improve their grades. Four candidates out of 14 did so in mathematics with three attaining higher grades, whilst in English all five students achieved higher grades.

18. **Attainment and progress observed during the inspection**

23. Pupils' attainment, as judged from the observation of lessons, discussions with pupils and from scrutiny of their work, varies between, and sometimes within, subjects when compared to national standards. 237 lessons were seen and attainment was average or better in nearly 70% with little variation between key stages. In 21% of lessons attainment was above national expectations, particularly at key stage 4 and post 16 where it was above average in 34% and 29% of lessons respectively compared to only 7% at key stage 3. Average attainment for a class signifies that the proportion of the class achieving or exceeding the national

standard is broadly in line with that found nationally. These figures are very high for a non-selective school in an LEA with grammar schools.

1. As many subjects in the school teach classes set by ability in some years whilst others teach mixed ability groups it is inappropriate to draw too many conclusions comparing statistics for individual subjects or year groups. However, there was significant variation between years. The proportion meeting national expectations was particularly high in year 7, where it was 85%, and year 12, where it was 79%. In year 8, however, attainment was average or better in only 57% of lessons. Attainment was above average in a particularly high proportion of lessons in year 11, 37%. Attainment in the sixth form is judged against national expectations for the course being followed, rather than for all students. Attainment was average or better in all lessons seen in art and design, food technology, life skills, textiles, GNVQ leisure and tourism and health and social care, dance, and A level law, sociology and psychology. It was average or better in over three-quarters of lessons in geography, history, music, religious education and business education. Only in information technology were standards generally below average.

25. Overall progress is good. It was sound or better in over 90% of lessons observed and good or very good in nearly half. Again there was little variation between key stages, although it was least good in year 8 and year 9, although in the latter it was hardly ever unsatisfactory. Progress is best where teacher expectations are high, the tasks challenging, and pupils are given opportunities to show initiative. Progress is always, or almost always, sound and often good in art and design, design technology, geography, history, mathematics, music, physical education including dance, science, and post 16 non-National Curriculum subjects, and in over 80% of lessons in English, information technology, languages and religious education.

26. The observations of attainment and progress in lessons were confirmed by the surveys of pupils' past work. These showed that the majority of pupils take great care with their work, but that the ablest are sometimes insufficiently challenged by the tasks they are set. For some pupils, the quality of their work varies between subjects. Attainment and progress are enhanced by much good quality teaching, the positive attitudes of pupils, their attendance and the effective management of the school.

27. The majority of pupils with special educational needs make sound progress at both key stages. The targets on pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) are prepared by subject teachers and, as a result, refer directly to skills needed in their lessons. Targets are shared with pupils. Those with low reading scores on entry are carefully screened and given intensive help by the co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) throughout year 7 in small groups. The ten in the current year 7 are improving steadily as a result. Pupils who read at levels two years below their chronological age in years 7 and 8 are allocated to an adult volunteer who listens to them read and charts their progress. Pupils enjoy this experience and gain in confidence. The SENCO or one of her team of learning support assistants (LSAs) gives pupils between stages 3-5 of the Code of Practice additional help in class. Pupils with full statements receive skilled and sensitive support, helping them understand concepts and remain on task throughout. This was seen in English, geography, music, science and mathematics in particular. Frequently, the provision of carefully adapted materials enables pupils to play a full part in the lesson, as seen in an art lesson where a visually handicapped pupil was supported in colour mixing and helped to progress at the same rate as the class.

28. There is no discernible variation in the attainment and progress of pupils from minority ethnic groups in comparison to others within the school.

24. **The core subjects**

29. In English, attainment matches national expectations in all but lower sets at the end of key stage 3. It is above national expectations, especially in literature, by the end of key stage 4. At A level pupils meet the course expectations in year 13 but in year 12 find literary criticism demanding. Pupils are orally confident. Most read sufficiently well on joining the school to cope with the demands of the curriculum and those who cannot are supported to improve. Personal and factual writing are sound. Pupils are prepared thoroughly for key stage 3 tests and attain well in literature at GCSE because of the emphasis placed upon teaching set texts. However, weaknesses in spoken and written language skills need addressing. When given the opportunity, pupils perform enthusiastically, but the limited provision for development of voice and movement skills results in many remaining self-conscious when reading or acting, even in the sixth form. Pupils' progress in English accelerates as they move through the school.

30. In mathematics, attainment is in line with national standards at key stages 3 and 4 and for the course being undertaken post 16. There has been considerable improvement since the last inspection. Pupils join the school with standards which are often a little below the national average and make good progress at key stage 3. They are able to explain why they have made errors and can correct them. Progress at key stage 4 is sound with pupils consolidating knowledge and gaining confidence, although some abler pupils lack the confidence to attempt the more difficult problems set.

31. In science, standards of attainment at key stages 3 and 4 are above national expectations for similar schools. Pupils of all abilities gain a solid foundation and understanding of scientific knowledge and concepts, although none is prepared for the higher tier paper in National Curriculum tests, which is surprising. At key stage 4 pupils continue to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in identifying important factors in experimental work, making predictions and drawing conclusions consistent with the evidence. Students post 16 attain standards appropriate at A level. Pupils of all abilities acquire and consolidate their scientific knowledge at all key stages. Pupils of lower ability make especially good progress and this is a strength of the department, but the ablest do not make as good progress, particularly at key stage 3, as their verbal reasoning scores suggest they should.

24. **The foundation and other subjects**

32. Attainment and progress are particularly good in art. Teachers' expectations are high and achievement is celebrated through display. By the end of key stage 3, pupils can, for example, draw analogies when looking at paintings and make sensible suggestions about artists' intentions. In key stage 4, pupils use a range of media to imaginative effect and make detailed and sensitive studies of other artists' work. Drawings, by some, are exceptional. In the sixth form students have impressively honed drawing skills and are confident in painting. In music, standards and progress improve through the school. In year 9 pupils can identify elements of music and are developing technical knowledge. In key stage 4 pupils are good in composing, theory and listening skills, but have gaps in their knowledge and understanding in relation to a range of music. The A level student is making good progress. In physical education, including dance, progress is good over time. Attainment is broadly in line with national expectations. In key stage 3, pupils are creative, plan well and display a good range of movements in dance. They know the correct technique in hockey and were seen to perform good quality sequence work in gymnastics in year 7. At key stage 4 and post 16, pupils understand the health related principles of fitness training and display good creative and choreographic skills in dance.

33. In design technology, pupils make good progress throughout the school. Standards are high in food and textiles, although not as high in resistant materials. At key stage 3, pupils draw on knowledge of familiar objects to generate ideas, are sometimes able to design their own specifications and present their work well. In key stage 4, they use a wide range of strategies, have a sound understanding of the working characteristics of materials and techniques and generate their own ideas, as with the textiles research on Charles Rennie Mackintosh to support design work. Attainment in information technology is generally below national expectations in all key stages, although progress at key stage 3 is now satisfactory and some pupils are progressing to level 5 and are creating and testing sets of instructions for control. At key stage 4, except for some good modelling in music and design technology, standards are little above those seen in year 9. Some students are using PowerPoint for presentations post 16.

34. Progress in geography is mostly good at key stage 4 and sound in key stage 3 and post 16. By year 9 pupils are able to frame geographical questions and follow a sequential enquiry. In key stage 4, a good investigation of the local area enabled pupils to show independence, draw conclusions and carry out good analyses and evaluations. They have a good understanding of climate processes. In year 12 students have a secure knowledge of rural settlement patterns and apply models to analysis of patterns in a fieldwork case study. Progress in history is good throughout the school. Attainment at key stage 3 is sound, with pupils in year 9 beginning to make links between features of past societies. GCSE pupils are very good at analysing source material and placing it in historical contexts. At A level students are completing very good projects which reveal a progression in the use of methodology and critical evaluation. Progress in religious education is also good throughout the school. By the end of key stage 3 pupils have a good understanding of beliefs, festivals and practices in Christianity and four other religions. In key stage 4 they develop an increasing sophistication in producing evidence and arguments to support responses and a good understanding of the effect of religion on the individual and on corporate moral behaviour. Post 16 students develop further their moral response to

social issues.

35. Pupils make good progress throughout the school in French. Progress in communicating in the target language is strong. Standards of extended writing are above average. By year 9, abler pupils use a range of tenses and in key stage 4 can write both business and informal letters, sometimes creatively. Attainment in business education at key stage 4 has improved with more study in depth and a discussion based approach. Post 16 students make good progress in a range of business education courses at NVQ and A level standard, in GNVQ leisure and tourism and health and social care at various levels and in A levels in law, psychology and sociology. In law, for example, students are developing an excellent grasp of case law and are developing skills in mounting cases for the prosecution and defence. In sociology and psychology, students engage in lively debate and can substantiate their arguments from previous learning. Standards in law, psychology and sociology are in line with those expected for A level students.

24. **Pupils' general learning skills**

36. Pupils are confident and they volunteer answers readily in all lessons, including modern languages. They also seek clarification and volunteer points of view. They enjoy discussion and collaborate willingly in group activities. They listen well to their teachers and their peers and are sensitive to alternative points of view. Most teachers use subject specific vocabulary and, in some lessons, such as physical education, it is helpfully reinforced in display. Pupils' attainment is enhanced when teachers ask open-ended questions and force them to think for themselves as was seen in sixth form English and in mathematics. Most pupils, however, lack a wide vocabulary and teachers are not all sufficiently assiduous in correcting non-standard English and encouraging a more formal style.

37. Levels of literacy improve significantly as pupils move up the school. In key stage 3 pupils do not write enough and produce limited extended writing. There is little drafting or planning at this stage or use of techniques such as writing frames. Pupils are not encouraged sufficiently to write creatively or imaginatively. In key stage 4 the demands of external syllabuses ensure a greater volume and range of writing. Technical accuracy improves, although the lack of a whole school system for correcting errors gives mixed messages about its importance when some teachers do not correct errors at all. Work is increasingly drafted first and the final versions are often carefully word-processed. Pupils receive clearer information about attainment at this key stage. As with their spoken English, pupils lack a sophisticated vocabulary and are often unsure of the differences between spoken and written forms and this mars their writing. Most pupils read adequately on entry to the school and effective help supports those who do not so that they make good progress. Their personal reading is insufficiently influenced by teachers to ensure they begin to tackle writing of real quality. The school's literacy plan has interesting ideas for the development of key skills across the curriculum.

38. Many subjects provide pupils with opportunities to develop their numeracy skills. Pupils use spreadsheets and databases in ICT lessons to handle data and to apply and manipulate basic formulae. Many use these skills well. Graphs and data handling techniques are used in a range of subjects for illustration and interpretation. For example, in science pupils plotted results of an experiment and drew a line of best fit, although some had difficulties with the scale of the graph. In a year 10 science class pupils were able to calculate the resistance of a wire, with most able to relate the cross sectional area of a wire to its radius. Post 16 GNVQ courses include a full range of numeracy skills. In year 13 geography, pupils used a statistical formula correctly in analysing rural settlement patterns. In year 12 psychology, students use averages and measures of spread, but, surprisingly, do not make use of the statistical functions on calculators.

39. Information technology skills observed across the curriculum are generally at a fairly low level, often being little more than basic word processing. However, progress is being made at key stage 3, where pupils are independently able to create presentations, combining text and clip art. In key stage 4 there are good examples of computer modelling in using music software, such as "Notator," and control of a lathe in design technology. Post 16 pupils can scan images and add sound into PowerPoint presentations.

40. Where pupils have the opportunity to be creative they often excel. This is exemplified in the extremely high standards attained in art by many pupils, the quality of choreography and movement in dance and level of composition reached by some in key stage 4 music and quality of performance of various musical and choral ensembles. Pupils perform enthusiastically in English and drama, as in a year 7 poetry presentation, but have limited dramatic skills because of the lack of opportunity to develop them. Post 16, in GNVQ, students have

regular opportunities to present their work to others orally and using multi-media techniques. In health and social care, for example, they presented their findings on keeping healthy to a group of elderly residents in the area. Whilst there are opportunities across the curriculum to show initiative, to be creative and to use their imagination, creativity is too often stifled by over-structured or closed tasks, as in the use of resistant materials in design technology. Teachers are sometimes too tentative in giving pupils opportunities to take control of their own learning.

Other attainment

41. The school values pupils' attainment across every aspect of school life, not just the academic. Between November 1998 and November 1999, 42 students completed the Duke of Edinburgh bronze award, and 13 the silver. At the present time, 33 are working towards the bronze award, and two the gold. Recruitment has just restarted and already ten have signed up to convert their silver award to gold. A variety of competitive honours are achieved in sports. These have included, recently, honours in northwest Kent netball, Bexley cross country and at the Heathrow Games in hockey and athletics. Success has also been achieved in swimming and rounders, and the year 7 football team won a regional 5 aside competition. Achievement across the curriculum is supported by the wide range of extra-curricular activities in which girls participate. In the sixth form, students broaden their achievements by successfully undertaking a range of challenges for the ASDAN universities award (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network). Successful completion of these challenges provide them with additional points towards their university entrance requirements. The school has been working towards attaining the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark and expects recognition in the new year.

24. The views of pupils and parents

42. In discussions, pupils in all years indicated that they were made to work hard, expected to do the best that they could and that standards achieved within the school are good. Some older students feel that the pressure of work grows considerably in years 10 and 11 and that a little more pressure should have been put on them lower down the school in preparation. Some in years 10 and post 16, indicated that they had been "hit" by a lot of work in year 7, but that this dropped off in years 8 and 9. A few spoke of they, or their friends, failing to cope with the pressure. They indicated that they could talk to their tutor if this occurred. Pupils are positive about the rewards system, especially at key stage 3, and understand systems used for marking. All pupils indicated that they did homework, although the amount varies significantly between pupils and from night to night with those in key stage 4 and post 16. Some clearly work excessive hours some nights and feel that a homework timetable at key stage 4 might help. Sixth form students and some in key stage 4, indicated that they had experienced significant problems in mathematics earlier in the school, but that this had mostly been addressed over the last two years. However, a small number of parents of older pupils also raised concerns and indicated that they had had to employ tutors. Older students are aware of the improved monitoring that is being undertaken in the school and positive that their tutors are overseeing their work across the curriculum. However, a number indicated that they put considerably more effort into work in some subjects rather than others. This was transparent in the work survey at key stage 4.

43. Views of parents generally reflect those of pupils. 95% of parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed with the statement that "the school enables my child to achieve a good standard of work." Over a third agreed strongly. At the parents' meeting, parents spoke of teachers' efforts in bringing out skills in their daughters and the progress made in gaining self-confidence.

24. The school's use of data

44. The school now makes very good use of data, especially at key stage 4. Senior managers report that they are now receiving quality information from the LEA to help them do this. For each pupil information on entry includes four NFER test scores, including verbal reasoning, which are used for selection, and key stage 2 test results. Detailed information is now kept on pupils as they move through the school. At key stage 4 a system of predicted and estimated grades is used to identify potentially underachieving pupils. Statistical data is discussed at meetings of heads of department, who then discuss it with their departments. Targets are set for individual pupils, departments and the school. Targets are shared with pupils, who receive a letter indicating expectations, and those who may underachieve are mentored by tutors and senior staff. It is encouraging that pupils of all abilities are targeted, not just those at the grade C/D boundary as in many schools. The introduction of regular meetings between all pupils and their tutors to discuss progress and attainment is an example of good practice. Parents are to be invited to some of these meetings. The substantial amount of data that is being collated on individual students enables the school to set appropriate and meaningful targets. Middle managers are gradually developing the skills to analyse data effectively in order to address weaknesses.

24. **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

24.

45. Comments in the 1993 report on behaviour and discipline were positive. Attitudes, behaviour and personal development are now strengths of the school.

46. Attitudes to learning are very good; pupils are studious, concentrate well and are able to work both individually and collaboratively. Although some pupils are reticent, they work hard and respond well to high expectations, and have good confidence in performing in music and dance. In modern languages, for example, most pupils are very positive, well behaved and conscientious, prepare well for oral work and take care with written tasks. Pupils enjoy their work and respond very well at all key stages and answer questions enthusiastically. Instances of less good attention in a few lessons are linked to the slow pace.

47. Their behaviour in school, both inside and outside class, is also very good. Clear rules and regulations are posted in many parts of the school, and pupils' attention is drawn to them at appropriate times. Pupils are courteous to peers, teachers and other adults. They were extremely polite and helpful during the shadowing of classes which took place on the first day of the inspection. They are trustworthy, have respect for the school's property and that of other people, and they respond well to rules. This accurately reflects views expressed at the parents' meeting preceding this inspection. The school has a successful system of rewards, which is well liked, and there is some competition to see who can get most certificates for good comments. Sanctions largely take the form of detentions, although some pupils spoke of receiving lines. Parents are informed through notes made in the contact book. Some parents and pupils expressed the view that detentions, for lateness or forgetting to have the contact book signed, were excessive. However, the good practice in both areas suggests that the sanctions achieve appropriate results.

48. Pupils are also able to build very good, constructive relationships with peers and with teachers, and they display an admirable respect for the views and feelings of others. They show initiative, and are willing to take responsibility, such as class and sports captains and as library volunteers. Altogether, their attitudes, behaviour and personal development have a most positive influence on their learning. Their attitudes are well supported by a range of rules and codes of practice, and a helpful 'Study Guide'.

49. Personal development is taken further through the existence of a school council that addresses a limited number of school issues. However, there is a perception that things do not get done, and lower years would benefit from knowing more about its working. The "Listening Ear" system of sixth form peer counsellors, who listen, and give advice to pupils on personal and social issues, is highly thought of and well used. Pupils also generally feel they can go to their form tutor if they have concerns. There is a large number of school clubs: sport, including hockey, netball, football, and rounders, gym, dance, drama, orchestra, choir, chamber choir, gospel choir, mathematics, IT and homework.

24. **Attendance**

24.

50. Attendance was described as good at the time of the last inspection. It remains good: it stood at 92% last year, with an extremely low unauthorised absence rate of 0.1%, although authorised absence is average at 7.9%. Holidays account for a large proportion of authorised absences: the school will need to keep up the pressure if such absences from school are to be eradicated. There has been only one exclusion in the last three years. A new attendance register system has been introduced this term, and it is hoped that it will provide an even better overview not only of attendance, but also of other factors such as uniform checks and locker numbers. Attendance in the sixth form is good and well monitored. Study periods are largely spent in a pleasant room in the sixth form block or the library, and they too are well overseen

51. Punctuality is good. However, the narrowness of the corridors prevents pupils from moving smoothly from class to class between lessons, and sometimes leads to lateness to lessons. A short gap timetabled between lessons would be one solution to this problem.

24. QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

24.

24. Teaching

24.

52. At the time of the last inspection teaching was judged satisfactory in 82% of lessons, including 45% where it was good or very good. Concern was expressed about the quality of teaching in mathematics and this featured as a key issue requiring attention. There has been significant improvement in teaching across the curriculum. 95% was considered satisfactory with 62% good or very good. The proportion of very good teaching increases as pupils go up the school and pupils in years 7, 11, 12 and 13 enjoy a significantly higher proportion of good teaching than other years. Pupils in year 8 receive satisfactory teaching overall but have a lower proportion of good teaching than other years; they are also progressing more slowly. There is much good practice in all subjects but pupils benefit from a more than average amount (over 50%) of high quality teaching in art, music, religious education, history, physical education, English and mathematics, and post 16 in GNVQ courses and A level law, psychology and sociology. The improvement in mathematics teaching is a significant step forward

53. Pupils benefit from being taught in the majority of their lessons by subject specialists with secure knowledge coupled with a sound understanding of the requirements of external examinations. The only exceptions are some lack of familiarity with some software by ICT teachers, leading to inefficient use and lower attainment, and a more limited knowledge of resistant materials in design technology which sometimes leaves pupils unchallenged.

54. Lessons continue to be well planned in almost all cases and the most successful follow a similar pattern. Clear aims are shared with pupils; the teacher introduces or demonstrates the topic to be studied, involving pupils with good open-ended questioning, often of named individuals, to assure understanding and then sets challenging and varied tasks to be completed by pairs or groups with tight time boundaries. Their findings are then shared with the class in a final plenary and the aims reiterated. The most effective planning uses information about pupils' prior attainment and this is more common in key stage 4. Marking, too, at key stage 4 gives pupils a clearer view of their actual attainment. Some of the practice in key stage 3, although careful and detailed, praises warmly without explaining how work could be improved. Not all pupils understand the lengthy comments. Where subjects use setting there is not always any difference in the methodology or materials used leading to under-performance by those in the higher sets. In mathematics and geography, for example, well-chosen textbooks ensure that pupils progress at the correct level. In science, abler pupils are insufficiently challenged by probing questions of the "what if" and "why" type. Pupils have adequate resources in most subjects but some are in poor condition and pupils cannot always take them home. Homework is well used especially in the upper school and the attractive library with its enhanced resources, including computers, provides an ideal location for further study.

55. Memorable lessons include year 9 pupils reporting on a volcanic eruption, year 8 engaged in quality assurance activities on scones they had just baked, an effective demonstration of coiling in clay in year 8, year 7 finding their voices and confidence in presenting a poem and sixth formers being pushed to think through challenging topics as a result of careful questioning and decide for themselves in English, law, psychology, history and mathematics. The teachers in these and many other lessons combined rigour with fun. In the small number of weaker lessons, teachers tended to talk too much with few activities or to set low level tasks such as colouring. Pupils were not able to be independent or creative and the higher attainers were left unchallenged.

56. Pupils with special educational needs receive skilled teaching when withdrawn from English lessons for specific help with reading. They also benefit from sensitive help when supported in class, often with the use of well-prepared materials, which simplify and clarify the main teaching points. In key stage 4 in English, mathematics and geography, for example, smaller sets allow pupils to benefit from greater teacher attention but this is not available at key stage 3. Pupils benefit most when lessons are planned with LSAs in advance which is what usually occurs, and when the class teacher checks on progress during the course of the lesson. It is difficult for help to be effective when teachers talk to the class for the majority of the lesson, as sometimes occurs. In a few lessons, in history for example, pupils were given low-level tasks such as colouring pictures whereas in other lessons in the same subject they received good support. Where there is no LSA help, teachers adapt seating arrangements and materials to meet individual needs based on the targets they have written for pupils. They also make themselves available outside lesson times for additional help and contact parents with

subject specific guidance. In some subjects, such as physical education, food technology, religious education and mathematics teachers are assiduous about using and displaying subject specific vocabulary, which helps pupils. Others do not correct technical errors and are themselves careless about them when writing on the board.

57. Pupils who completed school questionnaires said they thought most of their teaching was excellent or very good. During the inspection they spoke of having to work hard, especially at key stage 4 with some regretting that more was not expected of them earlier. They appreciated the coursework deadlines but felt that the amount of homework set in key stage 4 was too variable, exacerbated by the lack of a timetable. Some were concerned about very small groups in the sixth form and some year 10 pupils found much of the life skills programme repetitive.

24. **The curriculum and assessment**

24.

58. The curriculum complies with statutory requirements in all but two areas; not all pupils study GCSE design and technology, as a consequence of limited accommodation, and not all sixth form pupils study religious education because of timetable restraints. The curriculum offer is strategically planned. Since the last inspection the school has successfully introduced the GCSE short course in religious education and extended A level and GNVQ provision post 16. The school has sensibly been cautious and has deferred introduction of GNVQ Part 1 in key stage 4 until the national picture is clearer, despite being identified as a centre of excellence by the awarding body, City and Guilds, for work post 16. Time allocation for subjects throughout is appropriate and the great majority of pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, have equal access to the curriculum.

59. Personal and social education is delivered through a well-organised life skills programme, which has been introduced since the last inspection. The course, which is accredited by the International Curriculum and Assessment Agency in years 10 and 11, makes a successful contribution to preparing pupils for adult life. It incorporates careers, health, drugs and sex education, aspects of environmental education and economic and industrial understanding into a single coherent course taught by specialists in years 9-13, but currently by tutors in years 7 and 8. Careers education, energetically led by the head of sixth form, is good and pupils value the advice, particularly the careers evening. The school works closely with the careers service and good links are established with outside agencies. As the sixth form expands, careers advice is changing to include support for university applications. Work experience in year 10 is well organised by the head of sixth form who has established good links between the school and local businesses. Careers resources are accessible and up to date.

60. Planning of examination courses is very good, making a crucial contribution to raising pupils' attainment and supporting progress. Schemes of work at key stage 3, although well structured in most subjects, vary in the degree of detail between subjects and between different topics in English and geography, for example. Activities are not always appropriately matched to the attainment of pupils. Setting is too often seen as an adequate response to differentiating work for pupils of differing abilities, rather than a part of an overall response to individual needs. Learning intentions are not always broken down into small enough steps in geography and history, for example. Good progress has been made in art since the last inspection in making the curriculum more challenging at key stage 3. Extra curricular activities are very good and include a wide range of activities and visits which enrich the quality of education.

61. The strengths in assessment, recording and reporting, noted in the last inspection, have been further improved to raise standards of attainment. Heads of year are actively involved in the academic monitoring system and almost all parents agree the school keeps them well informed about their children's progress and pupils know and like the system. Collection and use of data according to the school's policy is good across the school and departments use assessment effectively to report to parents, adjust teaching programmes and set ability groups. Annual reports meet statutory requirements. The setting of targets for individual pupils is good in key stage 4 and the sixth form. Assessment in vocational courses is rigorous and supports good progress. At key stage 3 formal systems for assessment are in place but are, as yet, often not closely enough linked with pupils' individual targets. Some subjects are more specific about what pupils have and have not learned and set clear targets for future work, as in science and design technology. Other subject comments say too much about effort and presentation and not enough about attainment. Self-assessment schemes have recently been introduced in some subjects. The quality is good in life skills where pupils check their progress against competency statements describing knowledge and skills, but some subjects only give pupils criteria for effort,

organisation and presentation and leave out subject specific statements regarding attainment.

62. Teachers mark regularly and use a common grading system for effort which feeds into the effective system of rewards. Marking of attainment is variable in quality within some departments. Younger pupils appreciate rewards, but do not always have a clear idea of how to improve their work, other than by trying harder. Marking of examination coursework and class work is good, with some good examples of detailed feedback on attainment and how to improve. Departments work together to ensure consistency and accuracy of judgements in key stage 4, although this process is less well established and judgements less secure in some foundation subjects at key stage 3, with little feedback to pupils using National Curriculum levels.

63. There is no disapplication from the curriculum in line with LEA policy. IEPs are simply written by the SENCO with the nature of the difficulties clear and the remediation strategies explicit. Subject specific targets are the responsibility of the individual departments and this is carried out well. All departments have a policy for special educational needs and a link teacher who joins the central special educational needs group which considers matters of common interest. This teacher is responsible for ensuring that IEP targets are correctly completed and that pupils at stage 2 are reviewed regularly. Pupils are moved up and down the stages appropriately. The SENCO oversees the progress of those between stages 3-5, including the arrangements for annual reviews. Pupils are fully involved in the process. The procedures are followed carefully although not all departments are assiduous in keeping to review dates and some lack expertise in assessment procedures.

24. **Pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

24.

64. The overall provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils was described as good in the last inspection. The school policy, devised and implemented since contributes significantly to consistency in practice across the curriculum. Overall provision remains good, but in some aspects is very good.

65. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Assembly themes are planned well in advance, with the same theme used in tutor group assemblies. The themes cover a broad area of human experience and deal with issues such as one world, international co-operation and peace. Wherever possible, themes are illustrated by reference to contemporary events which help to increase pupils' understanding.

66. In dance, a good video of "Ghost Dances" stimulated a sense of awe, wonder and reflection. Similarly, in mathematics, some investigative work offered pupils the opportunity to confront situations which promoted a sense of incredulity. A year 7 history lesson successfully developed the importance of religion in medieval Britain through creating empathy towards the lives of pilgrims. Clubs such as the gospel choir are also important vehicles for furthering pupils' spiritual development. Whilst progress has been made since the last inspection in developing a 'moments of reflection' book and 'thought for the day' in assemblies and tutor periods, particularly in years 7-9 and post 16, the school does not meet the requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

67. The provision for pupils' moral development is very good. The behaviour policy is clear and unequivocal and is closely followed in all parts of the school. Pupils are taught the principles which distinguish right from wrong and have a clear understanding of the issues involved. Pupils are given ample opportunity to discuss moral issues within the life skills course in all years and in a variety of subjects across the curriculum. Students in sixth form law grapple with difficult moral issues, with some finding it difficult to see both sides of an argument. The Listening Ears scheme, by which trained sixth formers are available to listen to lower school pupils, is an impressive way of helping pupils to sort out their problems.

68. The provision for pupils' social development is very good. Many opportunities exist for pupils to exercise responsibilities, including becoming 'form captain', 'sports captain', 'charity treasurer', or 'library assistant'. In the sixth form, the prefect system and Listening Ears scheme provide the older pupils with an important role in helping to further the social development of pupils lower down the school. Many of the projects that sixth formers undertake through ASDAN as part of the life skills course, including the organisation of events for pupils and for charities, play a crucial role in their personal development, building their confidence and their skills in dealing with people they have not met before.

69. Pupils' participation in the school council offers another opportunity for social development and a forum for exercising some influence on the life of the school. The work experience programme in year 10 and for some students post 16 provides a good range of social contacts and enables pupils to exercise responsibility in a work environment.

70. A range of school clubs take place at lunchtime or after school and are well attended. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is expanding and provides pupils with excellent opportunities for social and moral development. School charitable events such as the Harvest tea party and the Crisis at Christmas collection help to develop a caring ethos.

71. The school makes good provision for pupils to become aware of different cultures. In religious education pupils learn about the world from the perspective of all the major world religions. Lessons on North American Indians and the civil rights movement in America in history, and theatre visits and the study of writers from different traditions in English, help pupils' understanding of different cultures. In mathematics, pupils study the impact which mathematicians from different cultural backgrounds have had on the development of the subject. Visits organised by the art department both in the UK and abroad strongly encourage pupils' cultural development.

72. The language department organises visits abroad and the provision of occasional French days for different year groups help to promote a greater understanding of France's culture and values. In physical education, pupils study a range of dances from different cultures.

1. The school has made good progress since the last inspection in the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Whilst progress has been made in the further development of a collective act of worship in years 7-9, the provision still remains inadequate because of the failure of some tutor groups to refer to the thought for the week on a daily basis and to provide time for reflection. Opportunities should also be developed to celebrate the wide range of ethnic backgrounds of pupils within the school and within London and to celebrate further the achievements of women in society. For example, some pupils expressed surprise that there were famous women artists.

73. **Support, guidance and pupils welfare**

73.

74. Support, guidance and provision for pupils' welfare is very good. At the time of the last inspection, the school was reported to place "a high value on the pastoral care of its pupils." This remains true.

75. The school provides a caring and supportive environment. There are very good procedures for monitoring pupils' academic and personal progress, and there are projects planned to improve them further. These are complemented by efficient systems for monitoring and recording attendance and behaviour. Information about pupils' academic progress, received from subject teachers combined with baseline assessment data, helps to inform tutors in setting targets with pupils and parents. The use of target grades in many areas, particularly at key stage 4, has provided pupils with a clear indication about expected performance. The monitoring systems now in place show clear improvement since the last inspection.

76. Form tutors and heads of year provide a strong pastoral team which offers pupils clear support, advice and encouragement. This is complemented by advice from the LEA behaviour support team. A series of induction procedures for year 6 and 7 pupils ensures a smooth transition from primary to secondary school. Teachers are well prepared with detailed information about each pupils' academic and personal progress. The arrangements for helping year 9 choose subject options are well organised and helps pupils to make sound choices. The year 11 Road Show helps pupils to choose relevant sixth form subjects. Pupils are well prepared for life outside school through the life skills programme, which includes work experience and careers advice. The careers evening is popular and well attended by pupils and their parents.

77. There are good procedures for ensuring punctuality, good behaviour and attendance. The school's behaviour policy is consistently applied. The awards system acknowledges good work, effort, behaviour and attendance. Misbehaviour is dealt with effectively. The few instances of bullying are dealt with firmly and quickly. Pupils are confident in approaching form tutors and heads of year with problems. The involvement of sixth formers in the Listening Ear scheme is an imaginative and successful initiative.

78. The arrangements for child protection are good and meet with statutory requirements. There are designated staff with responsibility for this area and all staff receive appropriate guidance and training.

79. There are good arrangements for health and safety. The critical incidents policy is effectively implemented. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and any concerns are remedied as quickly as possible. There are clear arrangements for dealing with accidents and emergencies.

80. Letters to parents informing them of their daughter's special educational needs are brief and rather bureaucratic in tone. However, subsequent links are good and they are fully involved in details of their daughters' progress. Separate reports, alongside annual reports, are provided for these pupils.

81. Whilst provision for support, guidance and pupils' welfare is an undoubted strength of the school, pupils raised some areas where they felt improvements could be made. Some of these were also raised by some parents. The areas raised include the school canteen, with its cramped conditions, long queuing and poor quality food, access to the buildings at break and lunchtimes, the lack of lockers resulting in large bags having to be carried, the non-acceptance of trousers as part of school uniform, a lack of privacy resulting from arrangements for showering in physical education which could infringe pupils' dignity and the requirement for older girls to sit on the floor in assemblies. Senior managers are aware of these issues and have started addressing them. Consideration is being given to taking control of the school's catering contract, when it comes up for renewal. Provision has now been made for all years, except for years 8 and 9, to have access to the buildings at break and lunchtime and the possibility of purchasing some tiered seating for the hall has been investigated. Addressing many of these issues is made difficult by the nature of the building. For example, placing further lockers within the old building would be an issue of health and safety. Solutions to the issues should continue to be sought, with staff, pupils and parents being fully consulted.

73. **Partnership with parents and the community**

73.

82. Links with parents and the community were described as good in the last inspection report. Information from the school is now very good. It largely consists of written reports on pupils' progress, interim reports, followed up by evenings for all parents and additional interviews for those whose children are causing concern. There is also written information on 'Option Choices' for all year 9 and 11 pupils and their parents which are followed up by interviews, and there is a periodic and extremely informative parents' newsletter. Pupils' annual reports are thorough and helpful.

83. Other non-written information for parents includes open evenings for the parents of prospective new pupils linked to interviews with a senior member of staff. In the case of successful applicants this is followed up by a comprehensive parents' information pack and further discussions with teachers. There are also tutor evenings for year 7 parents, special meetings with the head of learning support for parents with children with special educational needs, and key stage presentation ceremonies. A wide range of year, termly and annual meetings with staff and careers evenings are well attended by parents. Average attendance at parents' evenings is close to 90%. In addition, there is considerable formal and informal contact between parents and heads of year, heads of department and subject teachers. A day-to-day update is provided by an immensely effective 'contact book' in which homework, teachers' comments, attendance, rewards and sanctions are noted. This information is read, and signed, by parents and teachers. This work is well supported by a Home-School-Student Agreement.

84. The head of learning support attends open and induction meetings and provides short information leaflets. She also briefs all year 7 tutors on pupils at the various stages of the Code of Practice in preparation for the first parents' meeting. The brief guidance for parents on helping with reading is useful.

85. Parents' involvement in their children's learning is very good. For example, some of them come into school to help with reading. This aspect of school life reflects good development since the last inspection. There is a good range of activities to support parents in their daughters' education, and altogether the partnership with parents is very good.

86. The Parents and Friends Association (PFA) is very active at fund-raising. Purchases include the attractive picnic benches scattered in the open recreation area. The Association also plays a key role at some parents' evenings.

87. There is an exceptionally broad range of outside organisations with which the school has established excellent links. These are carefully integrated into the curriculum and classroom activities. Initiatives include a bridge construction activity arranged with Neighbourhood Engineering and including Greenwich University, a French town day, a French breakfast organised by the languages and food technology departments, work in textiles with David Evans Silk Mill, and business studies links with the Bluewater shopping complex. In addition, there are good links with local sports clubs, good GNVQ links, and regular foreign trips to, for example, France and the Netherlands (art).

88. Visits by pupils are numerous and varied: destinations include theatres, museums, galleries, concert halls and Covent Garden, local stores in business education, Eastbourne as part of GNVQ training, the University of Greenwich in science and technology, and a wide range of other destinations associated with the school curriculum, including Devon (biology and geography) and Rochester Castle (history and RE). Other outside activities include supporting staff in the London Marathon, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, and ASDAN and GNVQ assignments. The ASDAN initiative provides some students with extra points towards their applications for university, as well as broadening their curriculum. An important internal activity is the collection of money for charity.

89. Visitors to the school include theatre groups, participants in the Blackfen School Book Week, the police, Shelter, representatives from local churches, local magistrates, elderly local residents for the Harvest Tea, and teachers involved in liaison with feeder primary schools. Work experience, too, is well managed and effective. The scheme incorporates not only local enterprises and organisations, but also parents and former pupils of the school.

90. There is excellent enrichment of the pupils' education through the school's links with the community.

73. THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

73. Leadership and management

73.

91. The last inspection in October 1993 found that the school was "managed positively, encouraging high expectations and a sense of caring." It reported that governors were "closely involved in the school at all levels." The current headteacher was relatively new in post at the time of the last inspection and local management of schools (LMS) had recently been introduced. The inspection reported that the school was moving through a period of change, with an "embryonic" senior management team and "a link role between senior staff and heads of department" having been recently introduced. Planning was reported to vary in quality between departments. The development of "procedures, at all levels of management, for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning" was identified as a key issue.

92. Leadership and management are now very strong and effective features of the school, although some aspects of monitoring and evaluation, especially by middle managers, require further refinement. The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He has a clear vision, based upon students' personal and academic development. He has an open, inclusive, consultative and supportive style and is accessible to both staff and pupils. His presence around the school, especially at change of lessons, and his informal, supportive interactions with pupils are strong features of his style, which help set the ethos of the school. He is ably supported by a senior management team, which is once again in a state of transition. Two experienced deputies have left during the last two years to take up headships and have been replaced by a deputy and a senior teacher, the latter from within the school. At the time of the last appointment, summer 1999, the head consulted with governors on the adoption of a new, "flatter" management structure, removing the distinction between deputies and senior teachers. They have also adopted a team approach with greater corporate responsibility, rather than separating academic, pastoral and administrative functions. Managers indicate that there is a productive tension within the team, which ensures that issues are fully aired.

93. Heads of year are very effective in the leadership and management of their teams of form tutors. Their excellent handbooks exemplify the move from a purely pastoral role to one which includes academic

monitoring, with tutors meeting regularly with pupils about their work. Heads of department provide good curriculum leadership and effectively manage their teams, often providing excellent support to staff and pupils. However, their monitoring of practice and analysis of performance varies in quality.

94. Since the last inspection significant progress has been made in monitoring teaching and learning. Senior managers have received intensive training to enable them to carry out annual evaluations of departments; other staff, including middle managers have received appropriate training. However, as staff change the training programme needs to be ongoing. A two year monitoring cycle has been adopted which is sensitively linked to teacher appraisal. However, as classroom observation only occurs in the second year of the cycle, it is not always as responsive to staff development needs as it should be. The quality and regularity of classroom observation varies between departments. Some middle managers are developing their skills in being evaluative, rather than just descriptive, but others need further support in doing this. Monitoring of pupils' books and marking also needs further refinement. Good progress has been made in involving middle managers in target setting.

95. The school is fortunate in having an extremely effective and well informed governing body, which has a good understanding of strategic management. The governors' wide range of skills have been used to develop a strong team. Many governors have, or have had, daughters at the school and ensure that pupils' views are heard. Very detailed and informative reports are provided by the head for every meeting of the governors, as are consultative documents to help inform their decisions. The extensive minutes of all governors' meetings, including those of committees, indicate that governors take informed decisions and oversee the management of the school effectively, whilst allowing paid professionals to carry out their roles. They discuss statistical information provided by the DfEE and LEA on the school's performance and hear presentations from departments. There is evidence that governors will challenge the school's managers, when concerned over a particular proposal. There is an effective committee structure which oversees curriculum, staffing and financial issues. The governors' Annual Report to Parents is very detailed and informative.

96. The school's aims place a strong emphasis upon the personal development of pupils, whilst stressing high standards and partnership. The aims are reflected throughout the work of the school and supported by pupils, parents and staff. Girls in all years indicate that the school values its reputation, high attainment and them as individuals and their enjoyment in learning. Governors see the high standards achieved by the pupils as a consequence of a clear partnership between pupils, parents and staff. A separate set of clear aims address the school's rationale in developing its sixth form. The school aims are well supported by a comprehensive set of policies and a variety of excellent documentation for staff, pupils and parents. Unusually, the detailed staff handbook contains a section on "Principles into practice" which reflects the head's vision and sets out to provide a framework for developmental thinking. This is to be commended.

97. Forward planning is effective and dynamic. Planning for the school's expansion and building programmes has been handled very effectively within the school. There is a thorough three-year development plan, which contains separate plans for each subject and aspect of the school. The format is based upon Ofsted headings. However, there is too little explicit reference to raising standards within most plans, although the head's paper to governors introducing the plan, alongside budget proposals, makes clear that the primary aim of the plan is to raise standards. The link between the plan and budget setting is exemplary. The governors have adopted a brief set of performance indicators to support their monitoring of the school's progress, in addition to the statutory assessment targets. Both the head and governors have a well informed and clear vision as to issues for the future, including responses to national initiatives, ICT developments, further building work, lifelong learning, further development of the sixth form and vocational education.

98. The school has a very positive ethos. Relationships are very good and most pupils enjoy being at school. They are supported over any rejection felt from not obtaining a selective place and encouraged to have the highest of expectations. The ethos is recognised and welcomed by pupils and parents alike. Staff, both teaching and support, are pleased to be associated with the school, as exemplified by the long association many have had. Whilst there is a caring ethos, there is an underlying emphasis on achievement and the provision of an effective learning environment. Pupils are given an opportunity to air views through a School Council and regular surveys are carried out to ascertain the views of parents and pupils. However, the ethos could be improved further by giving pupils opportunities to take greater responsibility for their own learning and by responding positively, wherever possible, to their concerns over provision outside lessons. The school successfully addresses equality of opportunity, ensuring that all girls can access the curriculum. Everyone agrees that racism and sexism are not tolerated and are addressed strongly if they occur.

99. There is limited reference to special educational needs in the staff handbook or the development plan although separate literacy and numeracy bids have been prepared. There is a governor with special educational needs responsibility. The school aims stress access and entitlement with the need to address unequal starting points by varied pace, content, task and/or support, although no specific guidance is given. The special educational needs policy is clear and straightforward. Guidance on identification of individuals is explicit. The SENCO role is simply described and involves monitoring and evaluation of both pupils and LSAs. There is a development pan which consists of largely maintenance activities apart from improving the delivery of literacy support in withdrawal sessions. Internal reviews are based on the Ofsted Handbook and include a section on special educational needs.

100. Whilst the Governing Body takes care to fulfil its statutory obligations, a few requirements are not met fully. Progress has been made towards a daily act of collective worship, but still requires further development. Provision for design technology at key stage 4 and for religious education in the sixth form is not adequate for all pupils.

101. The quality of leadership and management has improved since the last inspection and has been an important influence in the school's growing success.

73. **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

73.

102. The school is well staffed and teachers and support staff are effectively deployed. There is a very good match of staff to curriculum needs in terms of number and initial qualifications, except in ICT. There is a good mix of experienced and recently qualified teachers, with some who have given long service to the school and some recently recruited to meet the needs of an expanding school.

1. Arrangements for the professional development of the staff are good and well managed, setting out clear responsibilities and procedures and providing detailed evaluation of each year's activities. Clear records of professional development are kept and good systems used to disseminate skills and information acquired on courses. The deployment and effectiveness of classroom assistants and support staff are excellent and they have a beneficial effect on learning. They are well trained and very much a part of the drive for school improvement. The head of learning support is appropriately qualified and most of the LSAs have attended training accredited by the RSA. They have appropriate job descriptions. They attend all school meetings and training days. The allocation of staff time for fully statemented pupils has increased this year from 130 to 170 hours a week with three pupils having 56 hours between them and the others most commonly 5 hours each.

104. Arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers are good. The school works closely with Bexley LEA, a range of higher education institutions and other agencies, both attending and providing inservice training. Policy is implemented through effective line management, which enables teachers to have access to development opportunities for improving subject teaching and management skills. The school's arrangements for appraisal meet with statutory requirements and are in line for review alongside national changes in 2000.

105. There has been a dramatic improvement in the standard and quantity of accommodation since the last inspection. The last 6-7 years have seen several major building projects, because much of the accommodation had previously been inadequate, and to address the sharp increase in pupil numbers from 5 to 7 form entry. The resulting provision consists partly of newly built accommodation: seven science laboratories, five mathematics rooms, one music room, a sports hall, netball courts and the sixth form block; other new facilities have been located in existing buildings: they include two networked IT suites, a library-cum-resources room and two toilet blocks. However, there are still several demountables in use, and these are rather bleak and unappealing; they are just satisfactory. There are also some very small rooms. All rooms are well maintained, clean and warm, and there are good facilities for classroom displays that are used effectively to enhance understanding and celebrate success. However, storage for school equipment and pupils' belongings is scarce. A disturbing drainage problem goes back many years, but a lasting solution appears to be impossible. The school is doing as much as it practically can to minimise the problem. Accommodation overall remains unsatisfactory and does not support the effective delivery of the curriculum.

106. Accommodation during breaks and the lunch hour is not satisfactory: Pupils in some years have to make do with the open recreation areas, which are attractive and include picnic benches paid for by the PFA, and covered corridors and doorways. In the event of bad weather, including rain, some other areas are made available. The narrow corridors no longer satisfactorily accommodate the large numbers of pupils attending the school. Pupils and staff attempt to make the best of it, but the unavoidable congestion results in some lessons beginning late. Furthermore, the canteen is extremely small for the number of pupils wishing to use it at lunchtime; when combined with pupils' reports of poor quality food, which were confirmed during the inspection, the result is unsatisfactory and extremely slow service, exacerbated by the cafeteria system, congestion and some unavoidable pushing and shoving.

107. The library is an attractive new resource. It is well arranged with a good stock of books and computers. It is well used for specific lessons supervised by class and departmental teachers, and by pupils for independent work and reading. It is run by a skilled, enthusiastic and well qualified chartered librarian, who also manages a separate library fund, and her assistant. Resources to support A level study are updated annually. Critically, however, there is only a simple computerised library management system. This prevents pupils from making full use of the facility, but an enhanced system is planned. There is a separate careers library located in the sixth form block, managed by the head of sixth form and careers. It contains a good selection of leaflets, pamphlets and other publications giving advice on training and careers.

108. Overall, learning resources are satisfactory for the effective delivery of the curriculum. They range from unsatisfactory, with insufficient up to date computers in GNVQ classrooms which has some effect on the quality of work; variable with limited use of non-fiction and little poetry in English and a narrow range of classroom texts in history, for example; to good in music, mathematics, science and art, where there is a lending system whereby pupils may borrow materials for homework at the weekend. Overall the number of computers available for pupils to use is in line with the national average. Resources for pupils with special educational needs are adequate and those supporting literacy are good.

103. **The efficiency of the school**

109. The last inspection occurred in the second financial year for which the school had responsibility for its budget under LMS. It was reported to manage "its budget carefully".

110. The quality of financial planning is now excellent. The finance and general purposes committee and full governing body take their responsibilities very seriously and oversee the budget process most effectively. They are supported ably by the school finance manager and papers from the head, which clearly link the budget to development planning and contain very detailed explanatory notes. Papers relating to additional costs for the next financial year have already been discussed. The finance and general purposes committee meets regularly and sees its role to ensure monies are spent wisely. It is given a positive lead by an experienced chair, who has a business background. The school has wisely used its increased powers under LMS, for example in ensuring that there is a regular programme of decoration, in bidding for extra resources to improve the accommodation and in obtaining matched funding for specific enterprises. Governors have a sound pay policy, which is administered sensitively, and performance targets are set for the head and deputy. There is a clear charging policy within the school prospectus. This does not refer to charges for instrumental tuition which are notified to parents separately as funding is held centrally by Bexley.

111. The school received an income last year of just under £2.4 million, when grants, income from lettings and donations are taken into account. This equated to about £2270 per pupil. This was below the median nationally and significantly lower than the lower quartile figure for London schools. Despite this the school has managed to accrue a sizeable balance of around £250,000, although the £60,000 added last year according to borough accounts had already been committed. Governors and senior managers have clear plans for these reserves to support the growth of the school and additional staffing, enhance furnishings and develop ICT, whilst ensuring a balance to cater for contingencies. Since taking responsibility for its budget the school has had an ever-increasing roll, moving from 5 to 6 and now to 7 form entry, which places additional pressure on the school's budget. There is a separate school fund to which most parents pay a voluntary contribution of £10 each year. Additional support is provided to the school through the excellent fund raising activities of the PFA.

112. Governors have a very clear policy on developing courses within the sixth form. In order to broaden the curriculum, subjects with small groups are allowed to run for a limited period in order that the subject may

develop. In some cases this can result in very small groups, as once committed to a course, and students offered places, the course continues even if numbers decline. Whilst potentially expensive, this practice has supported the increase in the roll of the sixth form and is a sensible and economic way of developing it in the short term.

113. Overall the amount spent last year on teachers per pupil was below the median nationally and very low in comparison to London schools, although long-term illnesses resulted in high supply costs. Whilst expenditure on teachers has risen this year the pupil teacher ratio is above average for modern schools nationally. However, the contact ratio, the proportion of time teachers spend teaching, has reduced over the last two years and is lower than average. The amount spent on educational support staff is higher than average, whilst that spent on administrative staff has increased significantly this year from the lower than average figure spent last year. The money provided through the Standards Fund for staff development is appropriately used. Significantly more is spent on the staffing provision for pupils with special educational needs than is allocated by the LEA. SEN resources, staff and materials are effectively deployed.

114. The amount spent on learning resources last year was similar to the lower quartile nationally, and well below the lower quartile figure for London. It is allocated to departments on a formula basis in two halves to take account of pupil mobility. A small amount is kept to fund curriculum development. Very detailed calculations on its deployment are shared with staff and governors. Appropriate amounts were spent on the purchase of books and computers last year, although some computers are fairly dated and substantial investment is still required. This is being supported this year through the National Grid for Learning.

115. Financial controls within the school are also excellent. The school's accounts are regularly audited and show financial control and administration to be a strength. Using SIMS, the finance manager provides comprehensive, regular monitoring reports for the head, governors and all budget holders.

116. Day to day routines and administration within the school are also excellent. Computerised financial systems are used effectively. The SIMS attendance package is being adopted. The main office is excellent. It is very efficient and welcoming and plays an important part in the smooth running of the school. Procedures for cover, resulting from teacher absence, are sound. Communication within the school is excellent with both weekly and daily staff bulletins.

117. The school uses its limited resources efficiently and in a planned manner. Staff and learning resources are deployed very effectively. Despite its limitations, accommodation is very well used. Pupils' attainment is very good in comparison with similar schools and improving, with an increasing proportion continuing their education beyond 16. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance are also very good. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is provided, including a good choice of trips and school journeys. Despite running a number of very small classes within the sixth form in order to widen the curriculum offer, the school gives very good value for money.

103.

103. **PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS**

103.

103. **ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

103. **English**

118. At the time of the last inspection standards were described as good at key stages 3 and 4 and well above those in similar schools. Attainment currently is in line with national averages at key stage 3 and GCE A level and above at key stage 4. This is an impressive achievement for a secondary modern school with few high ability pupils.

119. At key stage 3 between 1996-8 pupils attained standards above those in similar schools. The 1999 results show a significant increase in the proportion gaining the expected level 5, leading to results which are very high compared to those in similar schools. Fewer pupils, however, gained the higher levels than in 1998, although the proportion remains above average compared to similar schools. Teacher assessment and test scores are very similar.

120. Results in English literature at GCSE are well above national averages. Girls gain better results in literature than in most of the other subjects for which they are entered and they also attain above the level of girls elsewhere in the country. The English language results in 1998 were similar to those obtained by girls nationally but declined this year. The proportion of pupils gaining A*- C grades in language was 20% lower than in literature. The department has correctly identified the cause as an over-emphasis on teaching the set texts at the expense of specific work on language skills. Steps are being taken to remedy this. However, the proportion achieving A*- C in language remains above national averages for all pupils and is well above average compared to similar schools. The proportion gaining A*-G grades has been well above national averages in both subjects.

121. Pupils who re-sat GCSE English language in the sixth form all gained A*- C grades. GCE A level pupils also all passed the examination in 1998 and 1999, although there have been fewer high grades than nationally.

122. Inspection evidence, including lessons observed and work studied, confirms the external results. Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 3 matches national expectations in all but low sets as would be expected. Year 9 pupils are prepared thoroughly for the tests. They tackle more demanding texts and tasks but higher attainers lack familiarity with a range of language registers and have a relatively limited vocabulary. Attainment at the end of key stage 4 is above national expectations, especially in literature. At A level pupils meet the course requirements by year 13 but in the first year find literary criticism demanding having had little background in the classics.

123. Pupils are orally confident. They question teachers when unsure and respond spontaneously "I've just had a thought about the book..." They listen well to teachers and peers. They collaborate well in group discussion and give well-considered feedback, although extended and more formal talk are infrequent. Pupils, even in the sixth form, have an uncertain grasp of standard English, one referring to Hamlet as "all loved up". Not all teachers correct inappropriate language. Little work on the development of language occurs, especially the differences between written and spoken forms. Pupils sometimes miss subtleties in language, particularly irony and humour. They read aloud accurately but flatly and teachers do not intervene to urge improvement in audibility or expression. When given the opportunity, pupils perform enthusiastically as seen in the preparation and presentation of poetry in year 7. However, drama is taught fortnightly in year 7 only, in unsuitable accommodation, which precludes the wide range of drama activities outlined in the National Curriculum. As a result, pupils fail to develop voice and movement skills and even in the sixth form are self-conscious when reading or acting. Year 8 pupils enjoy the drama club but have very poor skills.

124. On joining the school, most pupils can read sufficiently well to cope with the demands of the curriculum. Effective support enables the few who cannot to make a good contribution to lessons or to improve their skills in withdrawal groups and to attain at appropriate levels. Some well-chosen class texts, such as 'Across the Barricades' in year 8, coupled with interesting and challenging tasks, lead to above average attainment. However, not all classes benefit from careful selection and in year 8, in particular, there were some inappropriate choices. By the end of key stage 3 most teachers introduce the study of plot and characterisation well but devote little time to style and genre. Pupils read little quality prose, poetry and drama and few texts dealing with other cultures and traditions. Private reading is encouraged but not used to extend the abler readers. At the end of the key stage, many pupils are still reading the same formula novels they were in year 7. Parents and volunteers offer less experienced readers opportunities to read aloud and their fluency is improving as a consequence. Pupils enjoy the ICT based "Successmaker" scheme but it is too early to judge its impact on attainment. At key stage 4 the GCSE syllabus ensures a wider range of textual study and titles there and at A level are well selected and skilfully taught.

125. At key stage 3 pupils write too little especially in years 7 and 8. There are few extended pieces although last year's work on "Great Expectations" describing Miss Havisham's wedding day shows what pupils can achieve. Younger pupils undertake too many grammar and punctuation exercises unrelated to their actual writing and individual needs although some teachers convert these into more interesting work. It is sometimes difficult to see any difference in attainment between sets as work is insufficiently targeted at the various ability groups. Personal writing is satisfactory, although more often dealing with factual recall than emotions, but imaginative writing is rarely practised outside the confines of a set text. Factual writing is sound. Errors in standard English are not always corrected. Punctuation and spelling are weak in years 7 and 8 but improve by the end of the key stage. Pupils do not regularly proof-read their work and have few opportunities to write and

edit on screen. Handwriting is generally cursive and neat. At key stage 4 there is an impressive range of work on novels and plays, notably on “An Inspector Calls”, “Roll of Thunder” and “Macbeth”. Pupils are very well prepared for the literature examination but the need for more language work has yet to be fully met. Pupils do not write in a sufficiently wide range of forms. Many word-process their final drafts, although other uses of ICT, such as the Internet, are less common. At A level pupils are challenged to think for themselves but find this difficult as they have limited prior experience of writing from the literary heritage on which to draw. However, effective teaching and help with structuring essays enables them to reach course requirements by year 13. Some intriguing use of PowerPoint was seen in a presentation on a John Donne poem.

126. Pupils’ progress accelerates as they move through the school. Sixth formers work hard and progress satisfactorily, as do pupils in most lessons in key stage 4. At key stage 3 progress was satisfactory in two thirds of lessons seen, a finding confirmed by their written work. In the most successful lessons, pupils were actively involved as in a year 7 drama lesson or enjoying a well read novel, predicting outcomes and writing at length. Progress was slower when the work was undemanding, such as in “Bully” or too difficult as in “Goodnight Mr Tom” or when too little written work has been completed. Unstructured reading with a low attaining group in year 9 was unproductive. In key stage 4 progress was sound in most lessons and the quality of written work good. Pupils respond well to higher expectations. A low set produced high quality work on “Macbeth” helped by well-prepared resources. At A level the use of two filmed versions of “Hamlet” followed by their own acting animated pupils’ responses. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress when supported in class, especially when the class teacher does not talk or read for too long. Materials are adapted well for their use

127. There is a strong learning culture. Pupils are responsive, polite and enjoy warm relationships with their teachers. They take pride in the presentation of their work. They volunteer answers eagerly and like reading aloud. Their concentration is good. They collaborate well in group discussion where they respect others’ views. They enjoy English lessons as the increase in A level numbers shows.

128. Teaching was satisfactory in all but one lesson and in almost two thirds it was good with a few examples of very good practice. Teaching was better at A level and key stage 4 than in key stage 3. The department benefits from a team of enthusiastic English specialists. They use an effective common methodology similar to that of the National Literacy Project. Most lessons proceed briskly with effective open-ended questioning, often of named individuals. Good teacher selected groups work well on genuine tasks which often force independent thought, especially in years 11-13. Carefully prepared units, targeted at particular ability groups, enhance attainment, such as that on “Our Day Out” for lower sets. Homework is well used in the upper school but is sometimes undemanding in key stage 3.

129. In the small number of weaker lessons pupils worked at a slow pace with no guidance on time leading to a lack of momentum. They read Shakespeare poorly around the class and became bored or engaged in desultory ‘silent’ reading in the library.

130. The schemes of work have recently been re-written. Those for year 7 are the most consistently effective. Those for year 8 contain too much pedestrian work, although an interesting new poetry unit on the role of women is fun and controversial although it, too, concentrates on comprehension rather than personal responses. Most texts are well chosen, although classic texts, other than Shakespeare, are rarely used and insufficient poetry is taught and written. Moral and social concerns such as racism, war and disability are well taught through novels. The well-organised Book Week interested pupils in modern writers. Touring theatre groups visit the school and pupils attend productions especially of set books.

131. Assessment is efficient. Pupils’ work is carefully marked, sometimes with such detailed comments that some lower attaining pupils find it hard to understand them. Regular pieces in key stage 3 are given National Curriculum levels and most pupils have a realistic understanding of their attainment. This information and an end of year examination are used to inform the annual report. Teachers keep good records of pupils’ prior attainment, and of their current work, including oral exercises and homework and use these to plan, especially for pupils with special educational needs. Verbal reasoning scores rather than the results of end of key stage National Curriculum tests are preferred as indicators of attainment whereas the latter give a broader picture of a pupil’s strengths and weaknesses. Pupils’ self-evaluation forms are carefully completed and include well-chosen targets. The head of department is about to introduce a tracking system to chart pupils’ progress. This relies on quantitative rather than qualitative data. There are no internally assessed portfolios of assessed work to assist this process or guide new teachers.

132. The department is effectively and efficiently run, benefiting from a strong team with good professional standards. English and literacy development plans are of good quality. Excellent records are kept. Developments in ICT have been slow given the weaknesses noted in 1993. Staff discuss relevant issues at regular meetings, although they have not focused on approaches to teaching aspects of the subject. The planned consideration of the implications of the National Literacy Project is too distant. Monitoring is well developed by peer observation of teaching and documentation but there is less evidence of evaluation leading to changes in practice or materials prior to this year's weaker GCSE language results. The sound standards noted in the last report have been maintained although key stage 3 no longer shows the highest standards; these have transferred to key stage 4.

103. **Mathematics**

133. The standards of attainment of pupils entering the school are a little below the national average. There are few pupils joining the school who are performing significantly above average. The profile of pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 3 in National Curriculum tests (SATs) show that the percentage at level 5 and level 6 is in line with the national position, but is well below at level 7. The percentage below level 4 is low compared with the national norm. The school has a positive policy of entering all pupils in year 11 for GCSE in mathematics and almost all obtained a grade in 1999, well above the national average for all schools. Many year 11 pupils are entered for the GCSE examination in the autumn term. There has been an outstanding improvement in GCSE results since the previous inspection, particularly during the last academic year. In 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades was 37.2%. The result is approaching the national average for all maintained schools and well above average when compared to other secondary modern schools. No pupil has gained A* or A grades recently. The post 16 A level course was introduced in 1998 and its students have yet to sit their end of course assessments.

134. Attainment, as assessed during the inspection of work, talking to pupils and when observing lessons is in line with national standards at key stages 3 and 4. In the post 16 classes observed, levels of attainment varied from course to course and within courses. The overall standard is generally sound. Pupils with special needs are attaining at an appropriate level. At the last inspection it was reported that "Pupils have an insecure grasp of mathematical ideas and how to apply them and have difficulties with longer problems and unfamiliar situations". There has been an improvement generally and these points have been largely addressed and mostly rectified.

135. At key stage 3 and 4, many subjects provide pupils with the potential to use and develop their numeracy skills. In one year 8 registration class a competition was held that promoted keen rivalry between pupils when improving their understanding of their tables. Pupils have the chance to use spreadsheets and databases in ICT lessons to handle data and to apply and manipulate basic formulae for repetitive operations. Many can use these skills well and apply them to a range of work. Graphs and data handling techniques are utilised in a number of subjects for illustration and interpretation. An example being an attendance survey that had been recently conducted. In science, pupils plotted results of an experiment and drew a line of best fit. But some could not see the graph's value as a predictor. In some cases pupils had problems with the scale of the graph. In another science lesson the teacher put the pupils at ease by referring to "The use of common sense Maths!" Year 10 pupils were able to calculate the resistance of a wire and the effect on the electrical current passing through it. Most could also relate the cross sectional area of a wire to its radius. In a music lesson pupils were reminded of how the Roman numerals are formed and used. There is an emphasis in the post 16 GNVQ courses on the use of a full range of numeracy skills that are an integral part of the assessment requirements. These opportunities are fully exploited by the students and encouraged by the staff tutoring the courses.

136. At key stage 3, pupils' progress against previous attainment was at least satisfactory in the majority of the lessons seen. In over half of the lessons observed progress was assessed as good or very good. In most lessons progress is significant with pupils able to apply earlier learnt knowledge. Pupils work at an increasing pace during the lesson and are able to explain why they have made errors and how to correct them. During most lessons, many pupils are able to confront and work at more difficult examples. In some year 7 lessons most pupils had covered similar work in primary school but gained further insights as the lessons progressed. In some isolated lessons, some early tasks are undemanding and lack sufficient challenge for the high attaining pupils and they are expected to "plough through them" before more difficult examples are reached. At key stage 4 progress in all the lessons observed was satisfactory and in a strong minority good. Pupils generally consolidate earlier learnt knowledge through practice. Improvement in understanding during lessons is demonstrated by

improved confidence as the lesson progresses. One girl remarked that the method being investigated now "clicked" after she gained insight into the point that baffled her earlier. However, some able pupils lack the confidence to attempt the more difficult problems set. Pupils with special needs make at least satisfactory progress. Students on the post 16 courses make good progress.

137. Pupils' response in most lessons at all key stages is good or very good. In all lessons pupils are well behaved, very attentive during the introductions, work busily and generally complete the tasks set efficiently, quietly and diligently. They work well independently and collaboratively, when appropriate. The quality of relationships with teachers and other pupils is very good. Pupils are considerate and tolerant when fellow pupils make errors when answering the teacher's questions or when demonstrating points on the board. Pupils with special needs respond well to the assistance they receive. Pupils present their work in a neat and careful way. Many are willing to experiment and to ask for assistance when in difficulty.

138. The quality of teaching has significantly improved since the last inspection. The style has changed from mainly helping individual pupils to more whole class activities. In all the lessons observed the teaching was at least sound. In about two thirds of the lessons seen there were good features or the lessons were very good. The majority of the lessons followed the same sound and effective pattern. The aims are shared with the class. Introductions are good, sometimes lively and always involving the whole class. Lessons are well managed and planned. A good pace of working is engendered and maintained. The time spent on each activity is appropriate and there is a good summing up at the end of the lesson. Teachers work well with the special needs support assistants. Homework is linked to the class activity and in some cases the difficulty of the homework is graduated to match pupils' attainment. In the very good lessons, the teacher's high quality questioning encourages thoughtful responses from the pupils which are used to develop the lesson. In a very small number of lessons the work set contains some early exercises which are not sufficiently demanding for the pupils of higher ability.

139. There has been a complete review of the mathematics curriculum since the last inspection. It meets the requirements of the National Curriculum but the bonds between aspects of the subject and ICT need to be strengthened further. A new scheme of work has been produced that is linked with the newly acquired text books. The scheme is detailed and arranged to cater for the needs of pupils of all abilities including those with special needs. The new scheme addresses the need for more challenging work for the top sets in years 10 and 11 by introducing opportunities to study for GCSE upper tier entry, an area which had been previously neglected. Assessment procedures are generally good. The overall progress of pupils is tracked and targets are set. Teachers keep good records of attendance, homework and class-work performance. Pupils are encouraged to record what they can do after they have completed certain exercises. The assessment records, however, do not explicitly show individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses across the National Curriculum programmes of study.

140. The new head of department leads the department well. She offers firm direction and guidance and has a strong influence in the department. She has produced new schemes of work and other departmental documentation that has provided a platform for improvement in attainment. The planning is good; priorities have been identified and agreed and put into practice. The issue of the last inspection "to better manage the mathematics curriculum, teaching and resources" has been successfully addressed. New policies have been agreed by the department staff and put into practice. The department members have mainly accepted the changes and have implemented them in a way which is to be applauded. The new accommodation used by the department is excellent and provides a very stimulating teaching environment. Rooms are adequate in size, well furnished and with appropriate storage. The classrooms are further enhanced by high quality displays of pupils' work and carefully selected commercially produced materials.

141. There are four points on which the department should concentrate. It should continue to develop strategies for improving the confidence and attainment of the more able and potential GCSE A grade pupils. It should develop further assessment procedures in order to inform individual pupils of their own strengths and weaknesses across the National Curriculum programmes of study. It should strengthen the ICT element of the course and should strive to maintain the momentum of change and improvement.

103. **Science**

142. Standards of attainment at both key stages 3 and 4 are good, being above national expectations for

schools of a similar type. Pupils of all abilities gain a solid foundation and understanding of scientific knowledge and concepts in the National Curriculum programme of study. In key stage 3, pupils build upon their previous experience of science and enjoy demonstrating their ability to engage in experimental and practical tasks, plan fair tests, make accurate observations and take appropriate measurements.

143. In the past three years, attainment in key stage 3 tests has been above the level for schools of a similar type and at or just below the national levels. However, this year attainment at both levels 5 and, more significantly, level 6 fell. Pupils' attainment at the higher levels, 6 and above, places them in the lower quartile when compared with pupils from other secondary modern schools. This fall has been attributed, in part, to lower levels of achievement on entry in year 7. The department should undertake a detailed analysis of the pupils' responses to key stage 3 questions to ensure that all attainment targets are being adequately covered. Serious consideration should also be paid to the entry policy for the tests. At present no pupils are entered for the higher tier papers. This policy and the associated preparation may well be limiting the opportunity for pupils to gain success at higher levels.

144. At key stage 4, all pupils continue to develop their skills in scientific knowledge and understanding in identifying important factors in experimental work, making predictions and drawing conclusions consistent with the evidence.

145. Attainment at GCSE in science is at the national average and has risen significantly over the past four years. When compared with schools of a similar type, pupils' levels of achievement are significantly above national standards. The results this year are especially impressive with 54.5% of pupils gaining A* - C grades in the dual award science examination. This represents an improvement of 7% over 1998 levels. The number of pupils gaining a pass grade at GCSE science was 98.9%, a pass rate which is to be commended. Results at the highest grades of A and A* in 1998 and 1999 are below national levels, which is to be expected. No pupils attained an A* grade in 1998 and only 4% in 1999.

146. The relatively few pupils studying science at advanced level all gained pass grades. The numbers of pupils studying biology are increasing and A level chemistry has been introduced.

147. Pupils of all abilities acquire and consolidate their scientific knowledge in all key stages. Pupils of low ability make especially good progress and this is a strength of the department's teaching. Pupils at higher ability levels, as measured using VR scores and key stage 2 levels, do not make such good progress as their scores would indicate they should. It must be emphasised that the numbers of such pupils are low but the school will need to ensure that the teaching strategies and lesson planning continues to adapt and so will adequately cater for the increasing number of such pupils.

148. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is very good in both key stages 3 and 4. Much of this progress results from the use of very well planned and carefully structured support material, and consolidation and recapitulation of previous work. Although almost all of the topics notes, handouts and worksheets for pupils of all abilities are good and show adequate differentiation, more attention should be given to the setting of open-ended tasks and activities that require research and the synthesis of wider scientific experiences and knowledge. Since the last inspection, progress in levels of achievement has continued to rise and approaches national levels.

149. Pupils' attitudes to learning, behaviour and the quality of relationships are good at all ages. Pupils are valued by the science staff. It is a testament to the quality of teaching and the ethos of the department and school that this is so. Teachers give additional time to their pupils, in particular in the lunchtime revision classes.

150. Pupils' capacity for personal study is often good and they research and embellish their work. Some of the homework tasks, especially in key stage 4 are word processed. Behaviour in classrooms is good or very good. Where there is a lack of concentration by pupils this is the result of the slow pace and poor timing resulting in a lack of challenge and purpose towards the end of a lesson. Such occasions are unusual and infrequent. Pupils are almost always courteous and helpful. They are all well trained in the procedures of the practical workshop and show respect for each other.

151. Where there is a weakness it would be in the promotion and development of opportunities for pupils to demonstrate initiative. The department acknowledges this and it is being addressed.

152. Teachers have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject matter they are teaching. In the majority of instances their knowledge is good or very good. There were two incidents observed, however, where lack of a sufficient level of conceptual understanding of the subject limited the scope and richness of the topic being taught. All science staff are well qualified and up to date with current teaching developments and examination requirements.

153. The expectations teachers have of their pupils are usually high. In a few instances it could be higher, in particular, in the belief that further improvement in key stage 3 test scores and in the higher grades at GCSE is realistic. The pupils are able to respond well to challenging tasks and would enjoy being stretched further. In only a small minority of lessons observed was the pace barely adequate and the planned activity completed in good time. This is where greater breadth and depth to the topic or knowledge area can be introduced. This should include more probing questioning strategies to shape answers and more use of open-ended questions of the 'what if' and 'why' type.

154. The good level of resources and equipment enhances science teaching and experimental tasks are carefully chosen. The organisation and classroom management in lessons are good or very good. Standards of discipline are very high. Teachers expect pupils to be co-operative and hard working and in almost every case they are. Even a low ability group in year 11 was amenable and, although working at a slow pace, maintained an interest throughout the lesson. It is commendable that the member of staff concerned expected that all pupils in the group would get a GCSE grade.

155. The science curriculum meets recommended time allocations at each key stage and the planned provision of the teaching follows the statutory National Curriculum programme of study. The organisation and groupings provide equality of access and opportunities for all pupils. The provision of the dual award GCSE for all is to be commended. The mixed ability grouping in year 7 and banding and setting from year 8 onwards provides for the individual academic needs of pupils. The support and integration of pupils with special educational needs into the teaching is a strength of the department. Science staff set appropriate targets for pupils with identified special needs and these are shared with the pupil. The use of support staff within science is well planned and they provide essential and helpful support for pupils. In all cases where support staff were observed they were aware of the targets in the pupils' Individual Education Plans and had been informed about the aims of the individual lessons.

156. The use of the "Spotlight Science" scheme at key stage 3 provides for differentiated worksheets which also enable pupils of differing abilities to access the curriculum. Good use is made of these sheets and the associated help and extension material.

157. The science department makes some contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The surprise on the pupils' faces when they view an onion cell for the first time under a microscope, the stretching and bending of glass or the rate of reaction experiment, where a precipitate suddenly changes a colourless solution to a cloudy yellow, were all examples of good teaching where pupils experience first hand the thrill and excitement of the natural world. Well taught and organised science teaching at the school provides many planned opportunities for teachers to challenge and develop pupils' views of the spiritual and moral aspects of education. The well managed practical group activities promote, support and provide opportunities for pupils to exercise their social skills of co-operation, tolerance, respect for others and sharing. Such skills are promoted, and indeed, expected.

158. Colourful and effective displays of work and activities in the laboratories and adjoining corridors also help promote the collective celebration of individual and group achievements, however, little other evidence was seen during the inspection with respect to the contribution of science to the pupils' cultural development.

159. The science department is sensitively and well led, with the head of department deservedly enjoying the respect and support of the science staff, both teaching and technical. The head of department has carried out some monitoring of teaching within the department and is aware of team members' strengths. The development plan for the department is principally directed towards the monitoring and maintenance of existing structures and process and insufficiently focused upon future plans and ideals. This is a weakness. The commitment to the completion of classroom observation is to be commended but this will then need to be set alongside a commitment to professional development, as necessary. The development plan lacks specific medium-term aims to raise further the levels of achievement at key stage 3. Additionally, the attainment of

more A* and A grades at GCSE is an important target. The way the subject is taught reflects and supports the aims of the school. The department has a commitment to high achievement and rightly values and promotes the development of positive attitudes towards science as well as acknowledging the attitudes that are important in science.

160. The accommodation has significantly improved since the last inspection and the department is now housed in seven new laboratories, all of a good size, with sufficient storage, display and preparation space. The eighth laboratory is rather small for satisfactory practical teaching of thirty pupils. However, some internal re-organising of space would increase that available for pupils.

161. The provision of learning resources is good. All pupils at key stage 3 have their own textbook. Pupils at key stage 4 have access to a range of textbooks for class use and are generally allowed to take them home. The library is well stocked with appropriate science reference sources. The department also benefits from an impressive range of videotapes, which are being catalogued according to topic / age / ability range. The provision of science equipment is good and meets the needs of the curriculum. Good use of a video camera attached to a microscope, provides a valuable teaching aid, serving to reinforce the practical microscope work the pupils have carried out. Data-logging and computer facilities are good and the department would benefit from additional computers as the competence and skills of teaching staff and technicians' use of IT develops. There are sufficient A level texts and equipment to satisfy the demands of the chemistry and biology courses on offer.

103. **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

103.

103. **Art**

162. Very high standards of work are attained. Pupils completing their first three years meet national standards for the end of key stage 3. GCSE pupils achieve well above national standards, with 95% reaching grades A*-C, over half reaching grade B or above. A-level pupils also achieve results well above average, with 100% reaching grades A-C, with half gaining grade A in 1999.

163. The department has high expectations of all pupils and provides a solid foundation of skills. Year 7 pupils mix colours accurately, producing expressive paintings based on different artists' styles. They manipulate dry media deftly and design imaginative masks based on Native American and African patterns. Year 8 pupils show good understanding of clay's properties and produce paintings influenced by other artists' styles, showing independence and confidence in paint handling. Year 9 pupils draw accurately from observation, with attention to detail. They show knowledge of different artistic movements, for example Surrealism, making imaginative choices for their own work based on word play.

164. Year 10 pupils show sustained personal commitment in their sketchbooks and use a range of media to imaginative effect. They produce detailed studies of other artists' paintings, building a substantial body of work exploring different media. Drawing skills in particular are exceptional, showing dexterity and maturity. A-level pupils produce excellent work, characterised by detailed rendering of form and impressively honed skills, for example in drawing draped figures. They show consistent commitment to personal research in sketchbooks containing detailed studies and written ideas. Pupils are confident in painting, with expressive and fluent use of colour.

165. Areas to be developed include use of information and communication technology, though plans exist to remedy this. Year 7 and 8 sketchbooks could contain more experimental work.

166. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well with subject-specific targets recorded on individual education plans. Teachers give sensitive attention, make sure work is understood and provide regular help outside lesson-time.

167. Progress over years 7-9 is good. This is demonstrated by clear development of drawing and painting skills and by pupils' increasing ability to reflect upon their work. In GCSE and A-level classes, progress is very good. Pupils quickly gain the skills they need to carry out work independently. They are encouraged to find

solutions to problems for themselves. This is exemplified by the year 10 multi-media project, where an object is represented using varied techniques which pupils must learn.

168. Although systems for formally assessing pupils' progress are in place, the link between assessment and agreeing targets for individual pupils is not secure. Pupils' profiles do not always include specific targets and, when they do, they are often too vague, for example "X should continue to set herself ambitious goals and strive to achieve them". Pupils find it difficult to pinpoint specific goals they have to meet to further improve.

169. On-going formative assessment is good and pupils receive valuable oral feedback. Although broad learning objectives are presented in each lesson, they are not always broken down into small enough steps or given in sufficiently accessible language for pupils to understand. Pupils are usually clear about their tasks but not always sure why they are doing them.

170. Pupils are encouraged to show initiative, for example year 7 pupils are taught to maintain equipment correctly and quickly do so independently. Older pupils often work alongside younger pupils and provide excellent role models. Behaviour is good and relationships in class are harmonious. Pupils listen well to instructions and contribute enthusiastically to discussion. They are friendly and enjoy talking about their work. Pupils' positive response to classmates' work is particularly impressive. Lessons that end with a constructive evaluation session are very effective.

171. Teaching overall is very good. In years 7-9, teaching was good over 70% of the time and satisfactory in the remainder. Characteristics of good teaching include building on previous learning, well-prepared resources, praise and encouragement for pupils, good subject knowledge, stimulating resources, such as masks, and very good demonstrations. Teaching is consistently very good for pupils at GCSE and above.

172. Pupils carry out self-evaluation regularly, although more evidence of this could be included in their profiles. Activities are broad enough to meet the needs of all pupils and homework is effective in reinforcing lessons and extending pupils' knowledge and understanding.

173. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection in making the curriculum more challenging for younger pupils. Units of work help them to learn about the work of artists and make connections with their own work. Lessons are most effective when high quality resources are deployed, such as those for the work on Morandi. Although the range of male artists taught is broad, not enough women artists are included in teaching.

174. Pupils' oracy is promoted well through discussion, questioning, evaluation and use of an art vocabulary. All pupils develop literacy skills through sketchbooks and self-evaluation, while older pupils research during lessons. Homework features elements of reading and writing.

175. Spiritual, social and cultural development is particularly strong. An impressive programme of visits takes place, in this country and abroad. Teachers show considerable commitment to pupils' personal development and visits are followed up effectively with a strong programme of work, although contemporary issues are not explored enough through the curriculum. Staff feel valued and work as a collaborative team within a department that has an excellent ethos. Pupils clearly respect and value teachers and departmental rules are firm but fair, based on safety and consideration for others.

176. A dynamic new head of department has clear aspirations for maintaining and raising achievement. However, the art development plan does not reflect this vision. It is too brief, with insufficient reference to progress, attitudes and personal development. Most key tasks lack success criteria. Tasks describe activities, for example trip details, rather than clear objectives. Costing is not precise and there are no details of monitoring or evaluation.

177. Accommodation is adequate and used to best advantage by staff. Classrooms contain high quality, well mounted and stimulating displays. Pupils have access to interesting artefacts, books and themed collections of reproductions. Staff supplement resources creatively, exploring community links and scrap schemes, for example. Art would benefit from a review of resources on hand for improving information and communication technology. The art technician's work is an excellent asset in achieving very high standards.

103. **Business Education**

178. The department offers GCSE business at key stage 4 and at post 16 A level business and four courses at NVQ (levels 1 and 2). Only one cohort has so far completed A level. In 1998 results at key stage 4 were well below the national average. In 1999 the results increased by 18.5% to bring them above the national 1998 figure. The level of attainment of most pupils is in line with national expectations and for some pupils their knowledge and understanding exceeds the levels expected. In 1999 results at post 16 in NVQ were very good with 71.3% achieving a distinction, first or full certificate. The level of attainment for pupils is often good and sometimes very good, with most pupils gaining distinctions or credits. Attainment at A level, for the first small cohort was low, in relation to national standards. Although 80% gained a pass there were no grade A-C awards.

179. Progress made by pupils in lessons is mostly satisfactory at key stage 4 and mostly good post 16. Pupil response in lessons was satisfactory or better in all but one lesson. The best learning was linked to the best teaching. Pupils are generally keen to share their knowledge and interested in their work. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers are good, except where classroom management is weak and confused learning expectations create an unsettled atmosphere. When they lack self control they are, on the whole, calmed quickly by the teacher.

180. The quality of teaching at key stage 4 is satisfactory, with one lesson seen judged as good. There is good subject knowledge and lessons include the effective use of ideas from the news and the local environment to enliven teaching. Post 16 the teaching is satisfactory or better. At both key stages there is a consistent approach to the setting and marking of homework. Planning is mostly clear and teachers communicate interest in and enthusiasm for their subject. They mostly share the learning intentions with pupils but do not always check their understanding. Where the teaching is good, the intentions are shared and revisited, linking the learning to the activity, throughout the lesson and measurable progress is clearly made. Subject specific language is used well. Questioning of pupils is satisfactory but mostly prompts short answers rather than developing thinking and extending spoken answers. Classroom organisation and activities over time are varied but single lessons sometimes lack pace and variety.

181. The department offers a range of courses post 16 and timetabling is generally adequate. Where blocks of time are in place curriculum needs are more effectively met. For example, the second year A level student on a NVQ course does not have that extended opportunity. The department assessment policy is satisfactory and recording and assessment practices are clear. Marking is satisfactory and is consistent across the key stage. Work is marked in detail with comments and grades for attainment and effort. There are some signs of pupils responding to corrections. Post 16 in A level an additional mark is given representing an examination grade and in NVQ assessment and verification meet external requirements. At both key stages records of pupils' progress are maintained and discussed with them.

182. Staff are well qualified, enthusiastic and experienced. They work together closely, sharing planning, resources and teaching ideas. They meet monthly at departmental meetings and informally regularly. Development planning is sound and responsibility for targets is shared. Useful monitoring of teaching by the head of department takes place and could be developed further to broaden and share the range of teaching strategies and classroom management techniques in use.

183. The three departmental rooms, close to each other, create a pleasant learning environment, in which most of the teaching takes place. One room, however is small and a fourth teaching room outside the department creates organisational and classroom management difficulties. Storage is adequate but teaching in the fourth room causes resource pressure. The availability of sufficient appropriate computers causes some difficulties at both key stages, affecting standards. In general, there are adequate other office machines including printers, audio machines, telephones, photocopiers, a shredder and cassette radios to deliver an effective programme but there is a need to ensure that reliable and up to date machinery remains available. Some support from industry and the community has been accessed.

103. **Design and Technology**

184. At the end of key stage 4 standards are high, particularly in food and textiles. Overall GCSE performance is above the national average and in 1998 and 1999, for example, 66.1% and 63.7% of pupils

respectively gained grades A*-C. These compare with the 1998 national average for girls of 55.9%. Within these overall figures there are differences between subjects. Results in textiles and food are well above average, with 76% and 73% of pupils respectively gaining A*-C grades, and average in resistant materials where 43% of pupils gained the higher grades. Performance in 1999 was similar. Over the previous three years, and since the last inspection, results have been above average overall. At the end of key stage 3, when pupils are 14 years old, performance is also high and the results of the National Curriculum teachers' assessments show a steady rise from 1997 to 1999. The 1999 results are particularly high with 81% gaining level 5 or above.

185. These high standards are confirmed by lessons. Given pupils' starting points, progress is good both in lessons and over time so that by the end of key stage 3 most pupils are attaining at or above the national average. Although there is quite a slow start in year 7, pupils develop their designing skills well. They increasingly draw on their knowledge to generate ideas and can use sketches and models to clarify their ideas. In year 8, for example, pupils making cushions in textiles analyse different ideas to help them develop their work. Their ideas are developed well using sketches and drawings and the quality of presentation is reasonably good. In some cases design work is relatively limited, stifling pupils' creativity. In a year 7 lesson, for example, pupils making buggies all made similar products and the scope for inventiveness was quite limited. Pupils use tools, materials and equipment safely and with reasonable accuracy. They often use flow charts to help them plan and some change their ideas to cope with difficulties. In a year 9 food lesson, for example, pupils making bread were beginning to identify which ingredients work best.

186. Progress in key stage 4 is good and pupils both consolidate what they know, understand and can do and gain new learning. As a result attainment is above average overall by the end of key stage 4. A good example of the progress pupils make is the way they research in increasingly greater depth and use the research to help generate ideas. For example, one year 11 pupil studying textiles has carried out some high quality research on Charles Rennie Mackintosh to support her design work. Pupils have a sound understanding of the working characteristics of materials and techniques and this helps them to develop their ideas. Pupils organise their practical work well and use tools and techniques with the degree of precision required by their plans. A good example is in food, where pupils in year 11 are especially well organised. Similarly in textiles and resistant materials pupils organise their time effectively. In one year 11 resistant materials lesson pupils were well organised which helped them to make good progress and learn new skills. Attainment is above average in textiles and food but average in resistant materials because activities do not always stretch pupils enough. Pupils with special educational needs are making good progress in their skills in making products. This is reflected in their better than average GCSE results.

187. Pupils' attitudes to learning, and relationships with teachers and each other, are very positive. Pupils are very well motivated, interested in their work, and able to concentrate for long periods of time. Pupils always behave very well and treat the equipment with respect. The way pupils concentrate on their work is one of the reasons for the high attainment and good progress. Pupils are often very mature about their work; in textiles in year 11, for example, pupils showed sensitivity and creativity in interpreting the results of their research. The department has maintained the positive attitudes noted in the last inspection.

188. Teaching is good overall. In about 45% of lessons teaching is satisfactory, in 45% it is good and in just over 10% it is very good. In the best lessons teachers give clear explanations of the task and what they expect. This helps to set appropriately high expectations and demanding activities. For example, in a year 11 food lesson pupils were expected to be well prepared and manage their time effectively. Teachers know their subject well and understand how to make lessons interesting. Their enthusiasm for their subject motivates pupils and promotes learning very effectively. In a year 10 textiles lesson, for example, the teacher's knowledge made a positive difference to the quality of pupils' work. Well-timed interventions help to steer pupils in the right direction so that their learning moves forward. In a year 10 lesson where pupils were making a clock, for example, the teacher's help ensured that pupils learnt how to use a computer-controlled machine. Most of these good lessons are brisk, helping to ensure that learning is active and that pupils make good progress. Teachers give good opportunities for pupils to see high quality work by demonstrating techniques, such as using a sewing machine, clearly and accurately.

189. In all lessons pupils are managed well and this ensures that standards of discipline are high. A weakness in teaching, across all the lessons seen, is that learning objectives are not set out clearly. In some lessons this means that the pace is a little slow and that pupils are not pushed hard enough. Another weakness is that the balance between designing and making is sometimes not right. For example, in resistant materials year 8 pupils have not really started to make their product. In general in resistant materials, teachers are not

quite as secure in their knowledge and understanding of the subject as they are in textiles and food. As a result expectations are not as high as they should be and the work provides too little opportunity for pupils to develop their creativity or imagination. These factors explain why standards in resistant materials are not as high as in textiles and food.

190. The department is well led and efficiently organised and managed. The good team approach ensures that teaching is generally consistent and that teachers share ideas. One of the strengths of the department is the way this team approach creates a very positive climate for learning. Rooms are very well organised, display supports learning well and teachers work hard to improve provision. This has a positive impact on learning and helps to ensure high standards. Teaching is monitored but the results are not used effectively to identify what does and does not work or where there are weaknesses. Better use of monitoring, and of the analysis of examination results, would help to raise standards even higher. The school does not meet the statutory requirements for design and technology in key stage 4, as not all pupils study the subject.

103. **Geography**

191. Examination results have continued to improve at GCSE since the last inspection when standards were judged to be rising appreciably. In 1998, 60% of candidates attained A*- C grades, as compared to 55.4% of candidates for girls nationally. In 1999 the proportion of candidates awarded higher grades has been maintained at 60.8%. In both years the pass rate was 100% and no girl was awarded lower than grade E. The proportion of A*- C grades this year compares favourably with the Bexley average for all schools of 61.8%. A level results were below national expectations in 1998 when one out of three candidates gained an A - C grade. In 1999 this improved to two out of three getting higher grades.

192. Attainment, as observed in lessons and from work that was scrutinised, is roughly in line with national expectations at the end of key stage 3 and key stage 4, and below at the end of the sixth form. By the end of key stage 3 pupils are able to frame geographical questions and sequence an enquiry. Their knowledge and understanding of earth processes is sound and they can use a range of sources to write up a case study of the eruption of Mt. St. Helens. They are beginning to describe global patterns and make links between the USA and Mexico in terms of movement of people. Pupils can locate case studies correctly and use geographical terms accurately in spoken and written answers. By the end of key stage 4 pupils are able to conduct effective fieldwork investigations into comparisons of the quality of life in two local wards, identifying, reaching high standards of analysis and evaluation and drawing substantiated conclusions. Some year 11 pupils have already achieved almost full marks for their coursework and are estimated to get A and A* grades in next summer's GCSE examination. In class they show good knowledge and understanding of climate, interpreting a range of graphs and maps and incorporating data into written comparisons. By the end of the sixth form pupils' attainment is below national expectations, with limited analysis and use of data in describing case studies. Their marks for urban geography range from C to D and for physical geography D to U.

193. Progress in key stage 3 was good in one third of lessons seen and satisfactory in the rest. Year 9 pupils consolidate and extend their knowledge and understanding of earth processes through an in-depth case study of the Mt. St. Helens' eruption where the activities are interesting and resources varied. Year 8 pupils make good progress in understanding the complex reasons and range of opinions on population growth by engaging in a well-run discussions. Progress in key stage 4 is mostly good, as teachers give pupils explicit advice on improving their examination technique. Pupils gain expertise in interpreting questions and practice geographical forms of writing, such as comparison. In the sixth form there is satisfactory progress overall within a well-structured modular course. Pupils make good progress in applying their knowledge of settlement models to a case study of villages in Kent. Progress is unsatisfactory when pupils cannot easily recall facts from previous work and where practical work lacks accuracy. There are opportunities in all years for able pupils to make good progress in research and open-ended tasks. Lower ability pupils are given structured worksheets so they can cover the same topic as the rest of the class. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in class and make good progress.

194. Behaviour is very good and relationships between pupils and teachers are good in all classes. Pupils show interest in their work, usually sustaining a high level of concentration at all ages and listening well to each other and their teachers. They rarely waste time except when allowed to spend too long on making work decorative. Pupils show a good capacity for independent study, they are well organised and standards of presentation are high, particularly in GCSE coursework.

195. Standards of teaching have been maintained since the last inspection. Teaching is mostly satisfactory or better, with just under half good or very good. Subject knowledge is good and there are high expectations for work and behaviour throughout, with teachers organising pupils and resources well. Lesson planning is always satisfactory, with an appropriate sequence of activities and carefully selected resources to match pupils' abilities. Good planning identifies precise learning objectives, which are broken down into small steps and explained clearly to pupils. Lessons always get off to a good start. Homework is used effectively as an integral part of geography courses. The department uses regular assessment consistently and compiles detailed records to track pupils' progress. However, the department needs to broaden its repertoire of teaching styles in order to excite pupils. Good lessons often feature open tasks so pupils' interest is captured and they can make a range of responses. In year 8, pupils designed a poster to publicise the world's six billionth birth after a lively discussion of two sources presenting contrasting views on the same event. In year 9, pupils worked in threes, two taking the role of reporters and one a local resident, preparing before and after interviews to broadcast on the Mt. St. Helens' eruption. In year 13, pupils are able to study settlement patterns through fieldwork. Some aspects of teaching have limited effectiveness; the use of questions which invite only one word answers, planning in key stage 3 where learning objectives are too broad, too many closed tasks which lack sufficient challenge for the more able and a lack of feedback to pupils in marking on how to improve their work. Plenary sessions are not always used to consolidate or check learning.

196. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. There is equality of access to the curriculum for all pupils. The geography course caters for the individual requirements of pupils with special educational needs. Curriculum planning ensures that pupils build on previous experience and encounter increasingly demanding work as they move up through the school. Schemes of work for GCSE are good and teachers know the syllabus well. The quality of key stage 3 schemes of work varies from being detailed, as with year 9 earth processes, to sketchy, as with year 8 work on Italy. Fieldwork provision is a strength of the department. Geography makes a good contribution to moral, social and cultural development but opportunities for spirituality are not planned. There is a sound assessment policy. Teachers keep meticulous records and information on pupils' progress is shared. Teaching programmes are regularly adjusted using assessment information. Use of grades and rewards in marking is consistent. Some good marking checks inaccuracies and pupils correct them. Comments clearly tell pupils what they must do to improve their work. Some marking checks completion but fails to pick up inaccuracies and offers only comments on effort or presentation. Some teacher assessment of levels at the end of year 9 is too generous and a more thorough moderation of judgements is required. Target setting for individual pupils is not sufficiently detailed about what aspects of geography they need to work on to improve.

1. Leadership and management are sound and the department works as a team. The development plan identifies appropriate priorities but lacks sufficient detail about activities and success criteria. Monitoring of teaching and learning follows the whole school programme, although as yet teachers do not use classroom observation and feedback to share best practice. Support for the newly qualified teacher is good. Collaborative planning is a strength of the department and members meet regularly to discuss ways of improving the subject. The ethos for hard work and high standards is reflected in the department's commitment and success in preparing pupils of all abilities for GCSE. Aims are appropriate and mostly met.

198. Teachers are well qualified and there is a good mix of established and newly appointed staff. Classroom support makes a good contribution to teaching and learning. Arrangements for professional development are good. Accommodation is barely satisfactory. Resources made available for the department are efficiently deployed. There has been a judicious purchase of textbooks and video recorders and teachers make good use of them, but there are insufficient books for girls to take home. Library provision is good, with an ample range of books for loan and reference. Not enough use is made of pictures to celebrate places and people. There are no computers in the department and the weather station is broken.

History

199. Overall attainment in history is sound and in line with national expectations. At the end of key stage 3 the proportion of pupils achieving at level 5 and above is satisfactory according to teacher assessment. In lessons observed, attainment was sound and in line with national expectations.

200. Although attainment at GCSE dropped from 69% attaining A*-C grades to 56% from 1998 to 1999, pupils are still achieving above the national average, 54.4% in 1998, for all maintained schools, and around that for all girls in maintained schools, 56.7% in 1998. The percentage achieving an A*-G grades, 97.2% in 1999, is above the average for all maintained schools, 90.8% in 1998, and for girls in maintained schools. These are very high figures when compared to results for secondary modern schools.

201. Attainment post-16 in A level is below national expectations, with few attaining higher grades. In lessons observed, attainment was sound in relation to national expectations in year 12. Attainment in year 13 was below national expectations but satisfactory in relation to the ability of the students.

202. Pupils make good progress throughout the key stages. By the end of key stage 3, pupils have made good progress in most aspects of the subject. In year 7, pupils are able to demonstrate factual knowledge and understanding of aspects of the history of Britain. They are beginning to select and to combine information from sources and to acquire subject specific vocabulary. In a lesson on religion in medieval times, most pupils competently offered hypotheses about the reasons for religious offerings. By year 8, pupils are beginning to evaluate the merits of different sources, as was seen in a lesson looking at whether Mary, Queen of Scots, intended to murder Darnley. One class was beginning to consider different interpretations of historical events, as was evident in a lesson on different views about the Gunpowder Plot. By year 9, pupils are beginning to make links between features of past societies, as was evident in a lesson looking at the links between the Luddites and other resistance movements in the nineteenth century. However, evidence of understanding that some events, people and changes have been interpreted in different ways, and possible reasons for this, is limited.

203. Pupils studying for GCSE make good progress and build upon existing skills. They become very good at analysing source material and placing it within historical contexts, as was evident in their coursework on civil rights in the USA. At A level, some of the project work is very good and reveals a progression in use of methodology and critical evaluation of different sources.

204. History continues to be a popular option with seventy-two pupils studying the subject in year 10 compared with sixty-two in year 11.

205. Pupils' response at all key stages is very good. Pupils are keen to answer questions, are able to sustain concentration and are keen to take responsibility for learning when opportunities are offered. Pupils are willing to co-operate and to listen to each other's views. They are very well behaved in all lessons. They enjoy working in groups.

206. The quality of teaching is good at all key stages with some very good teaching seen in year 7. At key stage 3, subject knowledge is sound. In the best lessons, aims are clearly linked to activities. There is a good development of factual knowledge and understanding through question and answer techniques. The good use of praise and humour helps to motivate all pupils. Good classroom management is combined with very good relationships with pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported. Subject specific language is consistently developed. However, in some lessons, more able pupils are insufficiently challenged. Many lessons involve pupils answering questions from textbooks or worksheets. A greater variety of teaching methods, including more group and pair work and role play would help to raise standards further. The standard of homework set is good.

207. At key stages 4 and 5, a particular strength of teaching is the quality of support provided for pupils in preparing for examinations. Clear, high expectations combined with a good subject knowledge are helping to raise achievement. The variety of writing activities are contributing to the further development of skills. Some tasks are overstructured and are not suitable for the development of independent learning skills.

208. The quality of assessment is good. At key stage 3, however, the combining of effort and attainment grades could be confusing for some pupils. Assessment of different skill levels could be used more effectively

to support curriculum planning. At key stages 4 and 5, there is evidence of good formative marking and knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses.

209. The contribution of history to the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

210. Leadership of the department is good with a well qualified head of department who provides a clear direction. The department works well as a team, as is evident in the consistent implementation of departmental policy. Good support for beginner teachers is provided. Whilst there is no written departmental policy for monitoring and evaluating standards, there is good evidence of lesson observation by peers and useful feedback for beginner teachers.

211. The department has three full time specialists and one part-time member. All full-time members teach in each of the key stages. Whilst not a historian, a new member of staff is receiving good induction from the department. Resources are managed well although the department is still unable to make sufficient use of ICT. Classroom display is used well to enhance pupils' understanding and to celebrate their achievement.

Information technology

212. By the end of key stage 3, attainment in information technology is below national levels of expectation but progress is satisfactory. This represents no significant improvement since the last inspection. However, pupils are independently able to create presentations, combining text and clip art, that include Blackfen travel posters and show an awareness of audience. With support, pupils are able to generate a mailshot from a database. Pupils' samples of work indicate that they are able to create and test sets of instructions for control and are aware of the need for precision. There are too few opportunities for pupils to show what they can produce independently.

213. By the end of key stage 4, attainment in information technology is well below national levels of expectations and progress is unsatisfactory. This represents a regression since the previous inspection with attainment nationally having progressed faster than that in the school. Pupils do not progress significantly from key stage 3 in the communicating of information. Information handling makes use of a more complex search, but in the use of sensors, control and modelling they are at a no higher standard than for year 9. However, there are some good examples of computer modelling, for some pupils, using music software and control of a CNC lathe by those doing design and technology.

214. In the sixth form attainment for ICT is below national expectations but progress is satisfactory. Much of the work is similar to that covered at key stage 4 but pupils are now making use of scanned images and are adding them and sound to PowerPoint presentations.

215. Pupil responses are good throughout. They enter the computer rooms with enthusiasm and immediately settle down and get on with their work. There is an expectation that they will do something that is of value. Pupils mostly prefer to work independently but they nearly all discuss with their neighbours the work that they are doing.

216. Teaching is satisfactory at key stage 3 and post 16, but unsatisfactory at key stage 4. The range is from good to poor but is mostly satisfactory or better. The best lessons start with a clear explanation of objectives, include some whole class teaching and end with a short review of progress to reinforce what has been learnt. Lessons are well organised and all teachers follow a common format which ensures consistency. Homework is set on a regular basis and there are tests at the end of each unit of work. Mostly, the marking contributes to pupils' learning. In the weaker lessons, insufficient account has been taken of the match of the activity to the ability of the whole class.

217. There is some evidence that teachers are not sufficiently familiar with the software to exploit its full potential or use it in the most efficient way. An example of this was seen with post-16 pupils working on a PowerPoint presentation where they were spending too much time initially on what it looked like compared to its content. In addition, while the main software package being used is MS Office, no member of staff has been on a course which enables them to make best use of this software. The inspection report criticised the step by step approach by which the subject was taught and this has changed very little. The Keybytes package used,

while providing a structured approach, provides little opportunity for pupils to show what they can do individually and lacks challenge for above average pupils and for those with home computers.

218. Whilst there is insufficient time for the subject at key stage 4, there is an increasing use of ICT across the curriculum which is making a positive contribution to learning. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. In religious education, pupils' use word processing software and include clip art in their finished product. For French, pupils use software that involves text processing. For music, pupils use software for composition and to generate printed sheets of music. In design and technology, some pupils use a CNC powered lathe. Further opportunities that contribute to learning include the computer club at lunch times, involvement in the BBC Web-Wise project, the TESCO 2000 project and the Saturday morning courses for parents and pupils from year 7. Records are maintained of pupils' homeworks, which are graded according to the schools' marking policy and tests are taken at the end of each unit of work. The evidence indicates that teacher assessments at the end of key stage 3 have been over optimistic. This has resulted from teachers not clearly understanding the level descriptors and not distinguishing what was taught from what the pupils could do.

219. The department is well managed and has the necessary leadership and organisation to improve standards. Staff in the department meet on a regular basis to discuss teaching methods and the delivery of units of work. There are good relationships within the department and they work well as a team. The head of department monitors the work of the department by looking at pupils' work and observing lessons. This is fed back to staff in order to help to raise standards.

220. The school has a ratio of pupils to computers of 7:1 that compares favourably to the national average of 8:1 for secondary schools. This includes 132 PC workstations which are available exclusively for pupils use (a ratio of 8.5:1). There are also a range of other computers to which pupils have access. The limited range of software does not allow pupils to efficiently carry out National Curriculum related activities nor does it provide the opportunity to stretch pupils. The school is in the second phase of the NGfL programme and is using the money available to purchase new computers, upgrade hardware and provide Internet access through an ISDN line. These are sensible strategies and should help improve standards. The school is carrying out an assessment of NOF providers and plans to take up some training in next term.

197. **Life skills**

221. The life skills course was started in 1998 to replace tutorial time. It has a phased introduction, currently implemented in years 9, 10, and 11, with plans to extend to years 7 and 8 next year. The course has been carefully chosen to lead to accreditation to raise its profile. Year 10 and 11 work towards the International Curriculum and Assessment Agency Certificate of Personal Social and Health. Pupil evaluations show they are motivated by the course.

222. Teaching in one third of the lessons seen was satisfactory and two thirds good. Good teaching is characterised by good subject knowledge where teachers show confidence in handling controversial issues. A year 10 teacher used pupils' observations on the way the media portrays family life to teach about stereotyping in the press. Expectations for pupils to collaborate are high. Planning is good with clear learning objectives for each lesson, which are linked to specific areas of the syllabus for accreditation. Topics are related to pupils' own experience and interests. Teachers manage lively debate well, for example a discussion about personal safety in year 11 and role play on capital punishment in year 9. Management of pupils is good throughout. Discussion is organised in circles to facilitate easy exchange of ideas and to include everyone. There are clear ground rules for debate with respect shown by all. The use of time is good where the teacher sets time constraints on tasks. Suitable homework is set and is often preparation for the next lesson. In one lesson too long was spent on cutting and sticking, leaving insufficient time for the more challenging discussion about how the media portrays families. In year 13 individual support for pupils' personal statements is good.

223. Planning and assessment are good. Appropriate aims relate to the development of the whole person. Schemes of work are good. Course content makes a good contribution to equal opportunities with work on challenging stereotypes. Differentiation is by support and working in mixed ability groups. Pupils with special educational needs are able to participate fully. Teachers follow a detailed accredited mark scheme. Pupils check and improve their own learning. Evaluation and review of the course by teachers and pupils are regular and used to inform subsequent planning. A good profile for life skills is included in annual report listing skills,

understanding and progress.

224. There is a clear social, moral development in content of course, a collaborative approach and working with others part of assessment. The course makes a good contribution to moral and social development. Leadership and management of the department are good. Teachers are appropriately qualified, selected and trained to teach life skills. The department makes good use of the LEA and outside agencies for resources to support teaching. The provision of drugs education is good and teachers have attended appropriate training.

197. **Modern languages – French and Spanish**

225. In the 1993 Ofsted inspection, standards in French were judged to be high in relation to ability and high in most lessons. In 1999, in key stage 3, most pupils make good progress, especially in writing. The standard of extended writing is above average. Higher attaining pupils in year 7 produce above average work.

Year 8 pupils move into more complex work. By the end of year 9, most attainment is in line with national expectations in all attainment targets and above average in writing. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

226. Very good progress at key stage 4 has been made since 1993. GCSE results exceed school, local and national averages significantly. Almost 86% of candidates entered achieved GCSE grades A*-C in 1999. For that year 11 cohort, French was an option, so a smaller percentage of the cohort was entered than in other schools. The national recommendation of a modern language for all pupils in key stage 4 is now in place. In summer 2000, year 11 will enter either GCSE or the Certificate of Achievement. A small number of pupils are entered for GCSE in a range of other languages which they speak at home. These entries are consistently successful. In key stage 4 classes, attainment is in line with the sets in which pupils are taught. Key stage 4 successfully builds on the good progress made in key stage 3 and is consistently good. Pupils with special educational needs continue to make satisfactory progress.

227. A Level GCE French was introduced in September 1999. Attainment is below average. The accredited Foreign Languages At Work (FLAW) Spanish course was introduced at the same time. Attainment is average. Students are mostly confident and are making good progress.

228. Pupils are positive about learning languages. They behave well and most complete classwork and homework conscientiously. They participate actively in spoken work and strive for accuracy in both this and writing. The quality of presentation reflects pride in their work. Concentration through the hour-long lessons is often very good. Higher attaining pupils, particularly, ask questions about their work, albeit mainly in English.

These groups are keen to experiment with language creatively. One example was a year 8 class, where some pupils introduced humour to their drama recorded on video. A key stage 4 pupil wrote a formal letter as to a television editor, asking to participate in a show. Pupils co-operate and work effectively as a whole class, in pairs or groups and individually. They respond well to brisk, dynamic teaching, humour and high expectations, reflected in demanding tasks. Where teaching is good, pupils are confident and make contributions in a self-disciplined manner. In only one key stage 3 lesson was pupils' response unsatisfactory. Few use dictionaries or other references routinely.

229. The current teachers were appointed since 1994. In 1999, over half the teaching was good or very good. Little was unsatisfactory. Teaching is strongest in key stage 4. Staff are committed, speak well of each other and share ideas. They organise a rich range of visits abroad and school-based language learning activities. Teachers convey enthusiasm for learning languages. They provide good models of pronunciation and fluency. Most lessons begin with an announcement of the aims, followed by good exposition. Pupils are involved in practice of new vocabulary and structures followed by pair or group work. In most lessons there is an appropriate balance of activity. Teachers manage pupils well. They are calm and convey an expectation of good behaviour. Teachers speak in the modern language. Where instructions are complex, teachers ask pupils to explain in English. The atmosphere in most lessons is pleasant and marked by good relationships, which motivate and foster confidence. Teachers emphasise accuracy sensitively and praise attainment. In the best lessons, while pupils are practising conversations, teachers visit them in turn and provide individual support. This is particularly marked with special educational needs pupils. However, opportunities for extension during independent work are overlooked. Homework and classwork are well integrated. In key stage 4, teachers refer to examination criteria without labouring points. Sixth form students receive guidance on the organisation of work.

230. Mutual lesson observation is beginning to have an effect. Pupils have broadly comparable language learning experiences as they move from teacher to teacher. However, this inspection indicates that the best practice is not always shared across the department. There are instances in key stage 3 where the pace of lessons is too slow, planning is not thorough and pupils are confused. Some key language learning skills from part 1 of the statutory Programme of Study are insufficiently developed. There is a lack of experience of A level teaching. More training is needed to compensate for this.

231. Accommodation is barely adequate. Display is used to support learning and celebrate pupils' achievement. Much display is of a high standard and provides positive examples of good work. There are insufficient sockets for pupils to work independently with electrical equipment. There is a full-time French language assistant who is well deployed often within the classroom, as recommended by language teaching organisations.

232. The head of department provides effective leadership and management. Documentation to guide teachers is comprehensive. Curriculum planning, ICT, assessment and independent reading facilities in the school library demonstrate how the department responded to the previous inspection. The development plan is focused on raising attainment.

197. **Music**

233. The 1998 GCSE results, at 100% A*-C grades, are well above the national average of 69.3% for girls. However, the number of pupils entered was too small for meaningful comparison. The attainment of the year 11 pupils in the current GCSE group, judged on attainment in lessons and scrutiny of their work, suggests that they are in line to achieve a similarly high standard, though there are some gaps in their knowledge and understanding, particularly in relation to the range of music with which they are familiar. Their work in composing, theory and listening is very well organised and presented and shows very good progress over time. Progress in lessons is very good in key stage 4.

234. Attainment in key stage 3 varies across the key stage and between and within classes. Pupils in years 8 and 9 have not had a consistent and coherent experience of National Curriculum music owing to staff changes. However, lesson observations show that year 9 pupils are likely to be in line with the national expectation by the end of the key stage if they continue at their present rate of progress. The majority of year 9 pupils can identify the elements of music, drawing well on previous work. They are developing their confidence as performers and many are confident to perform to the class. They understand the difference in sound between major and minor and can explain the difference between chords and broken chords in music they hear, for example in an extract from Rachmaninov's 2nd Piano Concerto. Attainment in year 8 is variable. Pupils have a very sketchy and often inaccurate knowledge and understanding of the historical context of the music they hear. However, their listening skills are developing satisfactorily, most can identify instruments correctly and describe the sounds of the instruments using musical vocabulary. They are beginning to learn how staff notation works. They have a satisfactory knowledge of the musical elements, for example, explaining ostinato correctly. Most could play the ground bass of Pachelbel's Canon successfully by the end of a lesson. Progress is at least sound and good in some lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress.

235. One student is following an A level course. Evidence from work seen shows good progress during the first half term of the course in musical techniques such as analysis, arranging for string quartet, four part harmony and appropriate research tasks into aspects of musical history and the work of specific composers.

236. Literacy, numeracy and ICT are developed effectively in music lessons. ICT is used well to support pupils' learning in music, particularly in key stage 4 where pupils use CD ROM appropriately for research and information, and software, such as Cubase and Notator, for compositions. Electronic keyboards are in regular use in both key stages.

237. Pupils have positive attitudes to music in key stage 4. They are conscientious, very studious, well motivated and attentive. They concentrate very well on listening tasks and work extremely well both individually and in groups. They are very focussed, discuss and support each other well. Relationships with peers and with the teacher are very good. In key stage 3 pupils' attitudes are generally positive, although listening skills are not so well developed for some pupils in years 8 and 9. The majority of pupils are lively, interested and responsive to questions. They are keen to learn and to show what they know. They generally settle to practical tasks quickly and are well organised. Pupils showed a good attitude and response in the instrumental lessons and ensembles which were observed.

238. The quality of teaching is satisfactory or better overall. It is very good in all lessons in key stage 4. In key stage 3 it ranges from satisfactory to very good. Strengths in teaching include teachers' secure command of the subject, which is excellent at key stage 4. Teachers often build effectively on pupils' musical attainment.

Feedback on completed work and on homework is positive and constructive. Explanations are clear and questions well focused. The best lessons are well planned to involve pupils in a range of activities with a good balance of whole class, group and paired work and a balance between the two attainment targets. There is often good reinforcement of pupils' previous knowledge and understanding in both key stages. Teachers build well on this and enable them to make good progress. In the best lessons pace and timing are very good. There is good support for individuals.

239. In the majority of lessons teachers have high expectations and present a good level of challenge to the pupils, particularly in key stage 4. In lessons which were satisfactory, but have areas for improvement, there is a need to address the pace and timing, anticipating how long each part of the lesson will take and managing the time accordingly. Expectations regarding listening and responding to questions, for example always putting hands up and not calling out, must be firmly established with all classes. Singing in music lessons should always be treated as an aspect of performance and used as an opportunity to develop and refine pupils' skills as performers, aiming to achieve a high standard. Homework is set and marked regularly. It is relevant and appropriate, often involving pupils in useful research tasks and listening to music, for example on the radio.

240. The peripatetic instrumental lessons seen were of good quality. Teaching is supportive and encouraging. Teachers play to, and with pupils, providing good role models.

241. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The philosophy of the department is to provide access to music for all pupils and this aim is successfully achieved. The department is very well organised. The quality of documentation is very good. It is appropriately detailed and informative. There are new schemes of work which are of good quality, identifying the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be developed, ensuring progression and continuity. The newly introduced assessment scheme is appropriate. Pupils' work is recorded on cassette for assessment and record-keeping purposes. Monitoring of the quality of teaching is not yet well developed and effective. There is a need to ensure that this is carried out regularly with feedback given and targets set.

242. The provision for instrumental tuition has been very effectively developed over the past year. Over 125 pupils learn a range of instruments, including a large number who have singing lessons. This has grown from about 20 in the last year.

243. Music makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The collaborative music making which takes place develops their social skills and self confidence very well and encourages their respect for each other's work. There are very good opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of instrumental and choral ensembles, including a band and a Gospel Choir. Pupils are introduced to a wide range of music through the taught curriculum which has a strong world music dimension. There are opportunities for pupils to attend concerts and workshops such as a gamelan workshop at the Festival Hall. There are regular concerts in school which involve large numbers of pupils and pupils perform at special assemblies, for example Christmas and harvest. A concert tour in Spain is planned for 2001.

244. Accommodation is currently satisfactory. A new music room to be completed in Autumn 2000 will enhance the quality considerably. Resources are adequate and developing. Additional world instruments and some larger tuned percussion instruments would give pupils access to a broader range of classroom instruments. The resources made available for music are managed and deployed very efficiently and effectively to support pupils' progress.

197. **Physical Education**

245. The 1998 GCSE dance results were well below the national average but the most recent results were much better. Value added information indicates that in 1998 pupils did as well as they should. Pupils taking the examination course currently are achieving at least in line with expectations and some are performing at higher levels. They can use a range of techniques, and their movements show muscular tension and control; their response to a musical stimulus is often imaginative and expressive. Choreographic skills are good and reflect a sound understanding of dimension and timing, and how to show different levels in their dances. Pupils taking the recently introduced physical education examination course have a good understanding of games tactics, but in hockey basic stick work is weak. Teachers coach successfully within a game, helping pupils of all abilities to apply their skills. This is an improvement since the last inspection. A new AS dance

course has been introduced this year and the performance levels of the small number of pupils involved are high.

246. Across year groups, attainment in lessons is variable but broadly in line with national expectations overall; low attainment occurs more frequently in key stage 4, when new games are introduced, because pupils are not able to use generic skills successfully. Year 11 pupils have a sound understanding of the principles of health related fitness and they achieve good standards when they work practically. In key stage 3, some year 7 pupils are attaining above the national expectation in gymnastics. Their sequence work is good and is helped by the teachers' emphasis on movement quality. In contrast, year 8 pupils are not required to refine their sequences and, as a consequence, their movements lack fluency. The last inspection also noted this shortcoming in gymnastics. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in developing pupils' ability to plan and evaluate across the activity areas. In hockey, year 11 pupils were seen to plan tactics for short corners and make accurate assessments of their team's performance. In all key stages, pupils' performance is stronger in dance than in the other areas; this was also the case at the time of the last inspection.

247. In all key stages, pupils progress satisfactorily. In about one in three lessons they make good and occasionally very good progress. There are clear links between pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. For instance, in a year 8 football lesson, excellent class management and the structure of the tasks enabled pupils of all abilities to improve their goal keeping and striking skills. On the rare occasion that insufficient progress is made it is because pupils receive little feedback on their work and they are allowed to work superficially.

248. Pupils are generally positive about the subject. Their good attitudes show in the way they come to lessons well prepared and the effort they put into improving their skills. An example of this was seen in a year 10 GCSE dance group where pupils persevered with a difficult task of applying weight to body movements. Their keenness to be involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities also demonstrates their enthusiasm to extend their learning. Since the last inspection the indoor and outdoor facilities have been improved and this is having a positive impact on learning. However, although participation rates are generally good at key stage 4, pupils show more enthusiasm for sports hall activities than for games played on the field. In all years, pupils work effectively in pairs and small groups, and frequently demonstrate their appreciation of others' efforts and achievements. Behaviour is very good and pupils' of all abilities work safely and sensibly. After an impressive victory in a football competition pupils showed good sporting behaviour and the ability to win graciously.

249. The overall quality of teaching is better than at the time of the last inspection. Teaching is now almost always at least satisfactory, with a high proportion of good and very good lessons taking place. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and there is a consistent and effective approach to the management and organisation of lessons. Sixth form teaching is very good. Across all key stages, lessons are well planned and teachers make good use of vocabulary lists to help pupils develop subject specific language. Dance, and to a lesser extent games teaching, is enhanced by an imaginative use of video material. In the best lessons, teachers' expectations are high and their feedback to pupils helps them make quick progress. An example of this was in a year 7 gymnastics lesson where pupils were helped to improve by the teacher's effective questioning and sharply focused support of individuals. Since the last inspection, the requirement for pupils to plan and evaluate has been given a greater emphasis and as a consequence the range of teaching styles has increased across the activities. In a year 11 netball lesson, pupils' learning was enhanced by the open-ended tasks and the use of peers as coaches.

250. This is good department; the head of department provides strong leadership and is ably supported by other team members. Weaknesses identified in the last inspection have been largely tackled successfully and there have been improvements in the curriculum and in teaching. The programme meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and an impressive range of extra-curricular activities provides opportunities for pupils of all abilities to extend their learning. Assessment arrangements are sound but target setting needs to be introduced as a way of raising attainment, particularly for pupils taking the examination courses.

197. **Religious Education**

251. Pupils overall attainment in religious education is good. Attainment at key stage 3 is sound in relation to the requirement of Bexley's agreed syllabus. At key stage 4, all pupils follow a GCSE short course in

religious education. Attainment at the end of key stage 4 is sound in relation to national standards. However, results have risen substantially from 46% in 1988 to 63% in 1999 receiving a pass at grades A*- C. Attainment in the sixth form is good in relation to Bexley's agreed syllabus.

252. Good progress is made throughout the key stages. Pupils in year 7 are able to write about belief systems empathetically and in depth as is evident in their newspaper articles about baptism. By the end of the key stage, pupils have a good understanding of the beliefs, festivals and practices of Christianity and four other religions. Their ability to understand the effect that these beliefs have on members of the faith community is evident from written work about the key ceremonies in all religions. Pupils are able to develop further skills of enquiry into religions and their relevance to moral issues, as is evident from written work following a visit to the Imperial War Museum. Their ability to evaluate the differences between religious and non-religious answers to key questions is observed in pupils' extended essays about the Creation versus evolution debate.

253. Progress is made throughout key stage 4 in developing an understanding about religion as well as the effect of religion on individual and corporate moral behaviour. A lesson on arranged marriages resulted in pupils writing about the advantages and disadvantages of arranged marriages from different perspectives. Pupils develop an increasing sophistication in producing evidence and arguments to support and evaluate different responses to religious and moral questions, as is evident in the essays about the different religious attitudes to women in year 10 and their GCSE coursework on religion and the media in year 11.

254. In the sixth form, pupils develop these skills further in their consideration of religious and moral responses to social issues, as is evident in a game about poverty in India, which was observed in year 12, and a debate about whether issues are moral, religious or both in year 13.

255. Pupils' response to religious education is very good in all the key stages. They sustain concentration, behave very well and are courteous and trustworthy. At key stage 3, in particular, they are keen to answer questions. As they move through the key stages they show an increasing interest and respect for each other's feelings, values and beliefs. They work well in groups and are willing to share ideas and to help each other. Pupils take a pride in the outcome of their work.

256. The quality of teaching was good or better in all lessons observed. Lessons are well prepared and combine good subject expertise with the need to ensure that they are relevant to pupils' experiences. A good variety of teaching materials, including use of video, visits, ICT, pair work or group work, help to establish pace and pupil motivation. A range of writing activities for different audiences, including magazine and newspaper articles, poetry, extended essays and letters, aid the development of appropriate skills and understanding. Classes are well managed and relationships with pupils are good. Differentiation is generally by outcome. However, additional sheets are provided for pupils with special educational needs. Some of the more able pupils are not sufficiently developed in some tasks at key stage 3. Homework is set and marked regularly. Revision tests and model answers help to prepare pupils well for the examination at key stage 4.

257. Assessment and pupil target setting procedures are good, although not always related to expectations of the syllabus in terms of knowledge and skills at key stage 3. A more rigorous approach to determining the different levels of skills expected at key stage 3 would provide a clearer indication of pupils' progress.

258. Religious education is taught as a separate subject to all pupils in years 7-11 and to most pupils in years 12 and 13. Statutory requirements are thus met fully at key stages 3 and 4. However, whilst pupil numbers studying religious education in the sixth form have increased since the last inspection, statutory requirements are still not fully met, with a small number not studying the subject because of timetable restraints.

259. Religious education makes an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development within the school.

260. The department is well led. The planning is good, priorities have been agreed and implemented. Regular departmental meetings, informal monitoring and support for teaching, combined with good relationships between teachers, result in consistent implementation of departmental policies. There is no formal appraisal system within the department. A more rigorous approach towards monitoring standards at key stage 3 is needed.

261. The department is well staffed with three specialists in religious education. Procedures for induction and staff development are good. A good range of resources is evident including artefacts from all religions studied. Displays of pupil work are very good and help to raise achievement by demonstrating good practice.

262. The progress made since the last inspection has been good. Results in the GCSE short course are improving and religious education is now taught more frequently in the sixth form.
197.

197. **Other subjects post 16**

197. **GNVQ**

263. GNVQ is offered as a one year intermediate course in leisure and tourism and health and social care (year 12 students) and a two year advanced course in health and social care (currently year 13 students). In 1998, 100% pupils were awarded the foundation level qualification in leisure and tourism, as against 39.3% nationally. In 1998, 90% pupils were awarded the intermediate level qualification in health and social care as against 52.3% nationally. In 1998, 66.6% pupils were awarded the qualification at advanced level in health and social care as against 54.4% nationally. Attainment continues to be well above the national average. The department promotes high standards of achievement and demonstrates a year on year improvement in each programme. In 1999 the results for the foundation level leisure and tourism, the intermediate level leisure and tourism and health and social care and the advanced level health and social care were 100%, with above average merits and distinctions

264. Students make steady progress in acquiring skills, knowledge and understanding, as a result of work that is challenging and stimulating.

265. Students enjoy the courses and are co-operative in lessons. They work independently and help each other. There is clear evidence that the assignments give them the opportunity to research in a real vocational context and provide strong motivation. Students are making sound gains in their knowledge and understanding and developing independent learning skills, along with key skills. In intermediate leisure and tourism students visited travel businesses, interviewed managers and reported back on their findings. The organisation in their portfolios of work is good, demonstrating evidence of the value of action planning and reviewing in both the planning of the work and the quality of outcomes.

266. The quality of teaching is mostly good or better and follows a similar pattern to the quality of learning. Good teaching is characterised by good planning, organisation, appropriate tasks and very clear guidance about expectations in a single lesson and over time. Work presented is sufficiently challenging and teachers have a secure subject knowledge. Where teaching is very good several activities are initiated during a lesson, allowing for variation in pace and organisation. Knowledge of individuals is clearly displayed through a thorough and regular tutorial system. Examples of one-to-one customised support occurs through appropriate challenging question and answer sessions. When very good teaching occurs teacher questions are kept to a minimum and extended answers skillfully elicited from students, with opportunity to use technical language encouraged. Few examples of differentiation were noted, except in this way. Homework is used to good effect and is fit for purpose. In an advanced health and social care class students were expected to research additional material, whilst in an intermediate they were to practice orally the written presentation they had prepared.

267. The GNVQ course is providing breadth for a number of students and providing good vocational experience and additional key skill development. The stand alone key skill workshops in communication, numeracy and IT complement the learning integrated into to assignments and contribute to standards and quality of learning. Assessment and verification meet external requirements and appropriate records are kept. Feedback to students is sound. Students understand the assessment requirements and know what they have to do to reach higher standards. The curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

268. Staff are well qualified and experienced in this good department. It is very competently led and the GNVQ co-ordinator is ambitious and enthusiastic for her department. Day to day procedures are clear and largely effective and teamwork is evident. Systems for monitoring the quality of teaching are in place, with formal and informal observation and monitoring through the quality of student work.

1. Accommodation is largely satisfactory, as are resources but standards are hindered by the movement of both teachers and students and the lack of a base for materials and equipment. A student requiring an OHT to continue work was unable to do so as one was not accessible.

270. Most pupils use IT with ease. Examples of word processing, power point and desk top publishing are presented in student portfolios but the availability of sufficient 'capable' machines in the classrooms causes some difficulties, affecting standards.

269. **Law, psychology and sociology**

271. A level courses in law, sociology and psychology and foundation level GCSE law are offered as part of the post 16 curriculum. The GCSE course is followed, usually, as an additional subject by those taking GNVQ or NVQ courses and is taught by a business studies teacher. The A level courses are becoming increasingly popular choices and are now mainly studied by girls taking two or three A levels. Both subjects are taught by specialists, with the biological aspects of psychology taught by science teachers.

272. Results at A level in 1999, from small entries, were very mixed. All entered for psychology and sociology passed, but generally with lower grades in psychology, but with one A and one B out of four entries in sociology. Four out of seven passed in law, with one grade A and two grade Cs. Standards observed in lessons at A level and GCSE in all three subjects were average for the stage of the course, although in year 12 psychology students were covering a fairly low level mathematics section on measures of central tendency.

273. Pupils' spoken answers in sociology show understanding of key theories on punishment in the past and present and that they have a sound knowledge of the law. Pupils make satisfactory progress in knowledge of the importance of values and attitudes in society's approach to punishment, developing understanding of why people acted as they did in the past. Discussion supports progress well, as pupils support their assertions on justice with knowledge from the previous lesson. In year 13 psychology, students have a good understanding of the cognitive, developmental approach of Piaget. Folders show that students are making sound progress with appropriate skills being developed over time.

274. Students display good subject knowledge in law, with students in year 13 having developed a good understanding of case law. Students in both years ask searching questions and many can develop reasoned arguments to support their case, although some are easily swayed by their own prejudices and sometimes find it difficult to mount a defence for, what they consider to be, the indefensible. Progress is aided by the style of teaching, which gives students ample opportunity to develop their arguments, whilst providing a strong theoretical background to each topic. At GCSE, in contrast, attainment would be improved if a more investigative approach to learning was adopted, rather than students spending time copying notes.

275. Relationships in classes in all three subjects are very good and students feel able to challenge each other's views in genuine dialogue. They listen attentively to each other and respond with sensitivity. Folders are well organised and pupils show a good capacity for private study.

276. Teachers' subject knowledge at A level is secure in all three subjects and planning is good, although insufficient time was allocated to the main task in a sociology lesson as reading a difficult text aloud took up more time than anticipated. Students were able to engage in animated debate in sociology about the topics of punishment and justice because of the recent visit of a lawyer to talk about his work. The teacher carefully uses and explains technical vocabulary and the classroom features a good display of key words to reinforce knowledge of main theorists and concepts. A balance of enthusiasm and humour are used to maintain good relationships and all students are encouraged to contribute to discussion. Focused questioning helps students to interpret a difficult text on Durkheim's theories, but the pace slows as they falter in reading aloud.

277. In year 13 psychology, the teacher led a lively discussion on the theories of Piaget. Teaching was lively and informative and questioning was searching. A wide range of techniques were used to increase students' understanding. In contrast, teaching of a statistical module in year 12 highlighted an area where subject knowledge is less secure. Support from the mathematics department in using the statistical functions of scientific calculators could aid progress on what ought to be a straightforward part of the course and would support students in preparation for their coursework assignments.

278. Teaching in A level law is very skilled and lively. Very good subject knowledge enables the teacher to respond effectively to students' questions which are often quite searching. Skilled use of discussion aids students' understanding of issues, whilst developing the confidence of those who find the subject difficult. A feature of lessons is the variety of activities undertaken within each session.

279. There are well-organised handbooks for all three subjects that give clear guidance on the courses. Assessment is good and meets with course requirements. The curriculum is enriched and students' progress supported by visits and talks from experts. The presence of all three subjects in the post 16 curriculum broadens the offer to students. A significant number indicate their intention to continue their study of one of the subjects in higher education or to use it in applying for employment, for example as a legal secretary.

269. **PART C: INSPECTION DATA**

269. **SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

269.

280. A team of 14 inspectors observed 237 lessons over 52 inspector days. A total of 198.5 hours was spent in classes, 93.5 at key stage 3, 64 at key stage 4 and 41 post 16. All full-time and part-time teachers present during the inspection, except for the head, were seen teaching at least once, and almost all were seen on more than one occasion. All subjects were observed. On the first day of the inspection one pupil from each of years 7-11 was shadowed to registration periods and all lessons. A range of assemblies and registration periods were also observed, as well as many extra-curricular activities. Planned discussions were held with teaching and support staff. In addition to looking at pupils' work in lessons, inspectors made a detailed scrutiny of all the completed work of a representative sample of six pupils in each of years 7-11. Interviews were held with these pupils about their work, and larger group interviews, involving about 12 pupils in each year including the sixth form, were held to discuss general matters about the school. Many informal discussions took place with pupils both in and outside lessons. Subject inspectors also carried out a detailed work survey covering every year group and work from pupils of every teacher within their department. Planned discussions were held with the chair of governors, chairs of committees and the chair of the PFA. The registered inspector attended meetings with the staff and governors prior to the inspection and two inspectors attended a pre-inspection parents' meeting attended by 20 parents. Questionnaires were sent to all parents and 320 responded. Extensive documentation was studied prior to and during the inspection. Throughout the inspection the staff, governors and pupils were unfailingly co-operative and helpful and aided the smooth running of the inspection.

269. **DATA AND INDICATORS**

269.

269. **281.**

269. **Pupil data**

269.

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y13	1122	10	174	107

269. **282. Teachers and classes**

269. **Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y13)**

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	63.83
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	17.58

269. **Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)**

Total number of education support staff:	17
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	355

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: 74.6

KS3	28
KS4	21

283.

269. **Financial data**

269.

Financial year:	1998/99
	£
Total Income	2,393,196
Total Expenditure	2,333,221
Expenditure per pupil	2,211.58
Balance brought forward from previous year	191,212
Balance carried forward to next year	251,187

269. **284.**
 269. **PARENTAL SURVEY**
 269.

Number of questionnaires sent out: 1122
 Number of questionnaires returned: 320

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	18.8	73.1	5.6	2.5	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	29.1	63.8	5.3	1.9	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	14.0	55.4	25.1	4.6	1.0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	17.2	69.4	10.7	2.2	0.3
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	28.1	60.6	8.4	2.8	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	33.8	60.6	4.7	0.6	0.3
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	18.6	66.4	13.2	1.9	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	21.2	67.3	7.2	4.0	0.3
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	30.3	56.6	11.6	1.6	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	27.2	60.3	10.3	2.2	0
My child(ren) like(s) their school	37.8	53.4	4.7	2.5	1.6

269. **Other issues raised by parents**

269.

285. Parents who attended the parents' meeting and who returned questionnaires were almost universally very positive about the school. 33 of those who returned questionnaires wrote additional comments, which were again mostly positive. Parents spoke and wrote of the encouragement their daughters had received, the welcome they received as parents, the school's good results and high standards of behaviour and dress.

286. A small number of issues were raised at both the meeting and on the questionnaires. Most common complaints regarded the lack of facilities for storing books and hanging coats, the health and safety implications of girls carrying heavy bags, provision for girls at break and lunchtime and the large amount of homework set in years 10 and 11. Other issues raised included the use and threat of detentions for lateness and non-signing of contact books, diagnosis of and communication about special needs, the non-acceptance of trousers, concerns about some teaching in mathematics, and the speed at which complaints were followed up.