

INSPECTION REPORT

**Durham Gilesgate Comprehensive School
And Sixth Form Centre**
Gilesgate

LEA area: Durham

Unique Reference Number: 114310
Inspection Number: 183552

Headteacher: Mr M B Brett

Reporting inspector: Mr David Bate
1545

Dates of inspection: 22nd - 26th November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708099

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bradford Crescent Gilesgate Durham DH1 1HN
Telephone number:	0191 384 7505
Fax number:	0191 384 8012
Appropriate authority:	Durham County Council
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D J Southwell
Date of previous inspection:	January 1994

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
D Bate (Registered Inspector)		Attainment and progress; Teaching; Leadership and management; Efficiency of the school.
N Shelley (Lay Inspector)		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development; Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development; Support, guidance and pupils' welfare; Partnership with parents and the community.
J Bowden (Team Member)	Physical education.	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources.
A Cawthera (Team Member)	Music;	
P Copperthwaite (Team Member)	Equal opportunity.	Curriculum and assessment.
	Geography.	
D Cronin (Team Member)	Modern foreign language.	
A Hill (Team Member)	Special educational needs;	
D Lumb (Team Member)	Art.	
M McArthur (Team Member)	Mathematics.	
P Mitchell (Team Member)	English.	
L Ramsay (Team Member)	History.	Attendance.
J Skevington (Team Member)	Design and technology.	
R White (Team Member)	Science.	
J Woolley (Team Member)	Religious education;	Non NC subjects KS4;
	Information technology.	Sixth Form provision.

The inspection contractor was:

*Westminster Education Consultants
Old Garden House
The Lanterns
Bridge Lane
London
SW11 3AD*

0171 924 1093

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REPORT CONTENTS

Paragraph

MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well
Where the school has weaknesses
How the school has improved since the last inspection
Standards in subjects
Quality of teaching
Other aspects of the school
The parents' views of the school

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school	1-5
Key indicators	6

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Educational standards achieved by pupils at the school

Attainment and progress	7-14
Attitudes, behaviour and personal development	15-20
Attendance	21-23

Quality of education provided

Teaching	24-27
The curriculum and assessment	28-34
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	35-39
Support, guidance and pupils' welfare	40-47
Partnership with parents and the community	48-54

The management and efficiency of the school

Leadership and management	55-61
Staffing, accommodation and learning resources	62-71
The efficiency of the school	72-77

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

English, mathematics and science	78-105
Other subjects or courses	106-170

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

Summary of inspection evidence	171-172
Data and indicators	173

MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- Provides outstanding experiences for its sixth form students enabling them to achieve high GCE A Level and GNVQ results.
- Provides high levels of good and very good quality teaching across the school.
- Looks after pupils' pastoral needs very well and promotes very good moral, social and personal development.
- Enables pupils and students to make good progress and add value to their achievements.
- Provides a very strong programme of extra-curricular activities including excellent sporting opportunities.
- Enriches pupils' curriculum and learning opportunities very well through its links with business and the community and provides very good careers education and guidance.
- Provides very effective study support facilities to promote pupils' progress in literacy.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Low standards of attainment at A*-C grades in GCSE in Key Stage 4.
- II. Inconsistent teaching and ineffective management of modern foreign languages, geography and religious education, and unsatisfactory arrangements for the management of history in the main school.
- III. Pupils' spiritual development is not sufficiently promoted.
- IV. Statutory requirements are not met to provide a daily act of collective worship or religious education in the sixth form.
- V. Attendance in the main school is unsatisfactory.

This is a good school, which has many more strengths than weaknesses. The weaknesses will form the basis of the governors' action plan. A copy of this will be sent to every parent and carer of pupils at the school. Governors will report once a year on the progress they are making to address the issues raised in this report.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has improved significantly in key areas since the last inspection. Standards of achievement in Key Stage 3 and sixth form courses have improved significantly. The overall quality of teaching is now a very strong feature in most departments, with high proportions of good and very good teaching. The pastoral care of the pupils has improved significantly. Provision for their support, welfare and guidance is now very good. Provision for moral and social education and pupils' responses to these are now very good. The school's partnership with its parents and the wider community has greatly improved since the last inspection. The value for money provided by the school is now good, this represents a significant improvement since the last inspection.

Issues from the previous inspection

The school has responded well to almost all issues raised in the last report. It has increased the number of entries for GCSE and all students are entered for at least one GCSE with almost all pupils entered for a minimum of five subjects. Although boys still attain less well than girls at both key stages the gap between the two groups has steadily closed since the last inspection. There are now well established systems for collecting, analysing and using data on year groups and individuals. This in turn has a positive effect on classroom provision and teachers' ability to match work closely to pupils' needs. The curriculum time allocation reflects requirements in all aspects of the national curriculum. The governing body has made a clear decision to create smaller teaching groups in Key Stage 3 by using the staffing bonus created by the large sixth form. Satisfactory arrangements have been made to secure religious education in Key Stages 3 and 4 but no progress has been made in securing religious education in the sixth form or in securing a daily act of collective worship. The school development plan is now a comprehensive document with clearly expressed priorities, time scales and costings.

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	Grade
				<i>well above average</i>
				<i>above average</i>
				<i>average</i>
				<i>below average</i>
				<i>well below average</i>
Key Stage 3 Test				
English	D	B		
Mathematics	D	A		
Science	D	A		
GCSE Examinations	E	E		
A/AS - Levels	A	A		

Test results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were close to but just below the national average in English, mathematics and science. When compared to schools with pupils from similar backgrounds, the school is above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science. GCSE results in 1999 for the number of pupils gaining five subjects at grades A* - C were well below the national average and well below similar schools. This compared poorly to the 1998 results, when the school was well above average in comparison to similar schools. GCE A/AS Level results in 1999 were again well above the national

average, continuing the trend over recent years.

• **Quality of teaching**

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Satisfactory	English, Mathematics, Science, Physical education, Music.	MFL, Geography
Years 10-11	Good	English, Science, Physical education, Art.	Religious education.
Sixth form	Very Good	All subjects have elements of high quality teaching.	No areas of weakness
English	Good	Key stages 3 and 4 and Post 16.	None
Mathematics	Satisfactory	Key stages 3 and 4 and Post 16.	None

The overall quality of teaching across the school is good. It is very good in the Sixth Form, where there are no discernible areas of weakness. There are concerns about the unsatisfactory quality of teaching in modern foreign languages and geography in Key Stage 3 and religious education in Key Stage 4. There are high levels of good and very good teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form.

• **Other aspects of the school**

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and a strong feature of the school. Pupils' relationships and personal development are very good.
Attendance	Attendance levels are unsatisfactory in the main school.
Ethos*	The ethos for learning is very good. Pupils are keen to do well. The headteacher and staff are committed to high standards, and relationships are very good
Leadership and management	Leadership and management of the school are good. The school has a clear educational direction and purpose.
Curriculum	Curriculum provision in the main school is good and in the sixth form it is very good.
Pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and these pupils make good progress
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' moral and social development is very good, cultural development is satisfactory but spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Generally good. The professional development programme is very good. Resources are good and accommodation is adequate.
Value for money	The school provide good value for money. It adds most value in Key Stage 3, continued value in Key Stage 4 and good value in the sixth form.

**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

VI. It is very approachable and willing to help and support them and their children.

VII. It helps their children to achieve good standards of work.

VIII. The wide range of opportunities and support given to pupils outside lessons.

IX. The values and attitudes promoted by the school.

X. Mentoring arrangements for Year 11 GCSE pupils.

What some parents are not happy about

XI. Some inconsistencies in information for

• In the parents' meeting and their questionnaire responses, the vast majority of parents were very supportive of the school and the teachers in their work. They appreciated the values and attitudes promoted by staff and the wide range of opportunities provided by the school.

•

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order to ensure continuing school improvement and raise standards further the governing body, headteacher and all staff should:

- XII. Continue their work and efforts to increase the number of pupils attaining grades A*-C in five or more subjects in GCSE in Key Stage 4;
(*Paragraph: 9*)
- XIII. Take urgent and appropriate steps to ensure an improvement in the quality of teaching of modern foreign languages, geography and religious education in the main school; (*Paragraphs: 24, 25, 119, 137, 149*)
- XIV. Promote pupils' spiritual development in all aspects of the school life, including the curriculum;
(*Paragraph: 36*)
- XV. Ensure as a matter of urgency that the school meets statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils in the main school and religious education in the sixth form;
(*Paragraphs: 55, 163*)
- XVI. Ensure the efficient and effective management of modern foreign languages, geography, history and religious education in the main school;
(*Paragraphs: 57, 120, 138, 144, 150*)
- XVII. Continue to develop strategies that lead to improved levels of attendance in the main school.
(*Paragraphs: 21, 22*)

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- **INTRODUCTION**

- **Characteristics of the school**

1. Durham Gilesgate Comprehensive School and Sixth Form Centre is a split site mixed 11-18 school, managed as one school but located on two distinct sites one and a half miles apart. There are 946 pupils on roll, of whom 317 are located in the main 11-16 section of the school and 629 in the sixth form (The Durham Sixth Form Centre). The main school (11-16) is a neighbourhood comprehensive school with a traditional catchment area that serves the surrounding estates and three former mining village communities to the east of the city of Durham. The school serves an area of economic and social deprivation, including the ward with the highest adult male unemployment and highest levels of social deprivation in County Durham. The ward is subject to an SRB2 scheme. There are currently 97 pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) in the main school. This represents 30.5 per cent of the population and is above the national average.

2. Pupil numbers in the main school have declined significantly in recent years. The school has taken positive steps to address this problem, and invested staff time in working and liaising with feeder primary schools and parents. Predictions are that numbers will begin to rise again from September 2000. The school has a high turnover of pupils throughout the year. For example, only 56 pupils of the 1999 Year 9 cohort were in school for the end of Key Stage 3 tests, from an original intake of 70 pupils in 1996. Of the 72 pupils who began their GCSE courses in 1997, only 63 sat the examinations in the school at the end of Year 11. The population of the school is predominantly white, with only 0.6 per cent of pupils for whom English is an additional language, which is below the national average.

3. The attainment of pupils on entry to the main school is improving but it remains low. In 1996 and 1997, 60 per cent of the intake failed to achieve Level 4 in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2. This improved in 1998 when 50 per cent of pupils failed to achieve Level 4, and the figure fell to 40 per cent for the 1999 intake. In the main school, there are 106 pupils (33.4 per cent) on the register of Special Educational Needs, of whom 46 are at Levels 3-5 (14.5 per cent). Twenty-three of these pupils (7.25 per cent) are in receipt of a statement of special educational needs, which is well above the national average.

4. During the past year, there have been 47 temporary exclusions (43 boys, 4 girls) and one permanent exclusion (1 boy). The exclusion rate has remained static over the last three years. Attendance rates are below the national average and unauthorised absence rates are above the national average, although there are significant variations between year groups and from year to year.

5. The Sixth Form Centre is becoming ever more popular with parents and students from a wide area across County Durham. The Centre operates an open access policy, but courses are heavily weighted towards GCE 'A' Levels and higher GNVQ award courses. Approximately 90 per cent of the students come to the centre from schools other than the main school. The overall attainment profile of the sixth form intake is high with most pupils having attained a minimum of five A* - C grades at GCSE. Achievement levels amongst the sixth form students are consistently high. The Centre achieved the second best average A Level points score in County Durham (19.7) in 1998, and the fifth best in England for schools

with over 200 students in the sixth form.

6.Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	35	29	64

6. National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	16	21	19
	Girls	16	12	11
	Total	32	33	30
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	57.1	57.1	53.6
	National	63	62	55
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	11	15	14
	National	35	36	27

6. Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	13	24	14
	Girls	19	13	11
	Total	32	37	25
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	57.1	66	44.6
	National	64	64	60
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	11	13	11
	National	28	37	29

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	33	33	66

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	Boys	6	28	33
Achieving	Girls	10	27	31
standard specified	Total	16	55	64
Percentage achieving	School	24	83	97
standard specified	National	47.9	88.5	93.9

Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of *such pupils* who achieved all those they studied:

	Number	% Success rate
School	8	100
National		76.5

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

Attainment in the Sixth Form³

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	136	145	281

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	17.7	21.2	19.7	1.6	1.3	1.5
National			18.2			3.0

Number entered for the IB Diploma, and percentage of *such students* who achieved this qualification:

	Number	% Success rate
School	0	
National		

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of *such students* who achieved these qualifications:

	Number	% Success rate
School	32	97
National		79.1

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

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:

		%
Authorised	School	12.1
Absence	National comparative data	8.2
Unauthorised	School	0.9
Absence	National comparative data	1.2

6.

6. Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:

	Number
Fixed period	47
Permanent	1

6. Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:

	%
Very good or better	31
Satisfactory or better	94
Less than satisfactory	6

6. **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

6. **EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL**

6. **Attainment and progress**

7. Results from the Key Stage 2 national tests show that on entry there is a wide range of ability which is skewed towards below average levels of attainment. In 1999, 40 per cent of the pupils entered the school having failed to achieve the expected level (Level 4) in the end of key stage tests. In previous years, 60 per cent of the entry cohort failed to achieve the national average by age 11.

8. In the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, standards achieved by pupils in English, mathematics and science were close to but just below the national average. In 1996 and 1997 the results were below the national average. The 1999 results in English were above average in comparison with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Results in mathematics and science were well above average in comparison with similar schools.

9. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE A* - C grades in 1999, 24 per cent, was low in comparison to the national average, as was the proportion gaining five GCSE A* - G grades. Nevertheless, the number of pupils gaining at least one A* - G grade, 97 per cent, was above the national average. The results of both boys and girls were low in comparison with the national average, with girls achieving slightly better in five A* - C grades, but there was no difference in other areas. Over the last three years, the average GCSE points score per pupil has shown a rising trend at a faster rate than the national trend. The school's 1999 GCSE results were low in comparison with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. This contrasted sharply with the 1998 results, when the school was above average in relation to similar schools. This inconsistency reflects the unique nature of consecutive cohorts. Targets agreed with the local education authority for 2000 indicate a significant improvement next year and inspection evidence indicates that the present cohort has the potential to meet those targets.

10. In GCE A Level examinations in 1999, the school achieved an average points score per student that was above the national average, and well above the local education authority average for students entered for two or more examinations. In GNVQ in 1999, the school achieved results that were significantly above both the local and national averages.

11. In lessons in the main school, many pupils attain standards in line with national expectations in mathematics, information and communications technology, music, physical education and religious education in Key Stage 3. The most able Key Stage 3 pupils also attain standards in line with national expectations in English, science, design and technology, modern foreign languages, history and art. Nevertheless, most pupils do not achieve the national expectations in these subjects. In lessons in Key Stage 4, pupils attain standards in line with national expectations in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, history, art and physical education. Most pupils attain below average standards in lessons in geography in both key stages, and in religious education in Key Stage 4. In almost all lessons in the sixth form, students attain standards that are at least in line with and often above national

expectations in all subjects.

12.The progress of pupils, including those with special educational needs, is good overall. Progress is most marked in Key Stage 3, where the school enables most pupils to move from a level of attainment that is below national averages on entry to close to national averages by the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science. This indicates that the school is adding significant value to pupils' achievement throughout Key Stage 3 in these subjects. Progress in Key Stage 4 is also good, with the school continuing to add value to pupils' achievements in English, mathematics and science, albeit at a slightly slower rate than in Key Stage 3. Although students enter the sixth form with above average levels of prior attainment, almost all make good progress in A Level and GNVQ courses. Most attain standards that are in line with or above national averages. There is clear evidence that the school adds further value to students' attainment in the sixth form.

13.Most pupils' literacy skills are satisfactory. In speaking and listening, pupils' performance in the main school is usually satisfactory and often good. As they move up the school, they begin to develop their speaking skills and employ an increasing range and repertoire of language. As a result, by Key Stage 4, the majority can use a variety of formal and informal language to articulate considered views. In the sixth form, oral abilities are of a very high order and are characterised by mature, sophisticated personal reflection on a range of challenging themes and issues. Standards of reading are satisfactory throughout the main school. For pupils in the top sets in Years 8 and 9, they are good. The majority of pupils read with fluency and due regard for the listener. In Key Stage 4, pupils are increasingly good at selecting, analysing and evaluating key points and themes in literary and other texts. Across the curriculum, reading skills enable pupils to access a range of subjects with reasonable facility. Students in the sixth form are expert scrutineers of complex texts, seen and unseen. Writing standards overall are unsatisfactory. Many pupils write extended narrative well, but spelling, punctuation and other errors in technical accuracy persist in each key stage. Evidence from the scrutiny of pupils' work in lessons and from a representative sample shows that pupils' choice of descriptors and other words is often adventurous. Work is nearly always presented neatly and handwriting is clear and legible, but control of sentence structure and paragraphing is less strong. Pupils' work in the top sets in Key Stage 4 engages the reader's interest, but few pupils can sustain work at the highest levels. In contrast, the written work of the majority of students in the sixth form is engaging, stimulating and of a very high quality, even at the beginning of their studies.

14.Pupils' numeracy skills are below average. Number work is the main weakness shown by pupils entering the school. Although this improves, many pupils show a poorer grasp of computational skills at the end of Key Stage 3 than found nationally. This limits their ability to cope with number skills in topics such as probability and statistics, and shows itself in subjects such as science, where a significant number of pupils have little real feel for number, especially when estimating. By contrast, many pupils show confidence in applying their knowledge of fractions in music. Calculators are sensibly used by pupils when appropriate. Spatial work is stronger than number, with many pupils achieving average levels of attainment at the end of each key stage, especially with angles, symmetry and trigonometry. There are especially good applications in art. Pupils can use a range of measures, choose appropriate units, and measure with confidence in mathematics and other subjects, such as art and design and technology

14. Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

15. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their work are good. Their personal development and their relationships with each other are very good. In the sixth form, all aspects are very good. This represents a further improvement on the last inspection report.

16. Pupils' attitudes towards their work are usually positive, with many good examples of perseverance and commitment. Pupils listen attentively, and most make a good attempt to meet their teachers' and tutors' expectations. A small minority of pupils are unenthusiastic about some subjects and their effort is only nominal. Attitudes of almost all students in the sixth form are very positive and committed.

17. Parents are pleased with the standards of behaviour, and inspectors confirm their view that instances of bullying are rare. The number of exclusions last year was high, but it was less than that previously reported. So far this year, the number of incidents has been substantially reduced, mainly because of the new strategies employed. Behaviour is good in most lessons. In the few lessons seen by inspectors where teaching strategies were inappropriate and discipline was not firmly applied, a few pupils were disruptive, sometimes disrespectful and wasted time. Behaviour around the school is good, and pupils conduct themselves in an orderly manner.

18. Pupils' relationships are particularly impressive, and are characterised by tolerance, mutual respect and support, and a sense of community. They get on well with each other during the many social opportunities and require minimal intervention from teachers. They work together very co-operatively in pairs or groups, are mutually supportive, and frequently show their pleasure for the achievement of others. They recognise the high quality of personal support that their teachers and tutors provide, and almost all pupils respond to this positively, with due respect and appropriate effort.

19. Pupils of all abilities generally have responsible attitudes. This is frequently demonstrated by their participation in many school and community-based projects, in which pupils often show great initiative by deciding their objectives and the means by which the project will be achieved. In a Youth Challenge project, a team of pupils worked with primary school pupils most effectively, taking full responsibility for organisation and the result, a very well designed mural painting.

20. Pupils benefit well from the programme for personal, social and moral education. They appreciate the issues studied, and apply their knowledge, for example the principles of citizenship are expressed in their dealings with each other and in their many community-related activities. Through the range and quality of their experiences, pupils make very good progress in their personal development through Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

20. Attendance

21. Attendance in the last school year was unsatisfactory, especially in Years 10 and 11. The school, in conjunction with the local education authority, has set a realistic but challenging

target for the present year and is striving in many ways to help pupils achieve it. Since the last inspection, a thorough system of rewards for good attendance has been introduced, and there are plans for further development.

22.A considerable amount of detailed attendance analysis is undertaken to identify year groups, tutor groups and individuals whose attendance is unsatisfactory. The data is used by a high profile working party who have put in place a good range of strategies to encourage good attendance. These include telephoning parents on the first day of absence and letters home on the third day. Attendance issues are raised regularly with parents. School Planners are consistently checked. Class attendance records are displayed. Schools Crime Awareness and Reduction Programme works collaboratively with Year 7 pupils in setting achievable targets.

23.Attendance at the Sixth Form Centre is good. It is supported by excellent monitoring by tutors and senior tutors.

23. QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

23. Teaching

24.The quality of teaching has improved significantly overall since the last inspection, and is a strong feature of provision in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Teaching in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Overall in the main school, teaching is at least satisfactory in over nine out of every ten lessons. It is good or very good in over half of lessons seen in Key Stages 3 and 4. The quality of teaching is very good in sixth form lessons, with almost half of lessons seen being of very good or excellent quality. It is unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3 in a small number of lessons, mainly in modern foreign languages, geography and religious education.

25.Teaching is good in English, science, art and physical education across the whole school. It is good in mathematics, information and communication technology and music in Key Stage 3. It is satisfactory in mathematics and geography in Key Stage 4, and in design and technology and history in both key stages. There are weaknesses in the teaching of religious education in Key Stage 4. In the sixth form, teaching is consistently good in all subjects, including GNVQ.

26.Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of how to teach it is strong in most subjects throughout the school and the sixth form, except in modern foreign languages and geography in Key Stage 3. Planning is good in almost all lessons. The use of carefully sequenced activities is energetically pursued, and high expectations are made clear of what pupils will achieve in terms of subject learning, effort and social skills. Most teachers use a good and appropriate range of teaching methods and strategies in all subjects except geography, modern languages and religious education, and work is generally well matched to the needs of the range of pupils in classes. Very good relationships, together with firm management, give pupils confidence and determination in their approach to their work, so that they seek to improve and make progress. Teachers use time very effectively in most lessons, and support learning with well prepared and relevant resources and materials. Almost all lessons have good pace and are very purposeful. Pupils are challenged well in most lessons in the main school, and they are highly challenged in sixth form lessons. The

use of day-to-day assessment is mainly satisfactory in the main school, but very good in the sixth form. Pupils' work is marked regularly. The quality of this marking is generally good, in that pupils are given careful and detailed feedback that supports their future learning and progress.

27. Praise and good quality verbal feedback is a strong feature in most lessons. This is sharply focused on helping pupils to understand what progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. Homework, while satisfactory in Key Stage 3, is well used in Key Stage 4 and is outstandingly used in the sixth form.

27. Curriculum and assessment

28. The school offers a satisfactory curriculum to pupils in Key Stage 3, while it is good for pupils in Key Stage 4, and that offered to students in the sixth form is very good. In the main school, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum, which includes all national curriculum subjects, religious education, personal, social and moral education, careers and vocational education. Since the last inspection, the school has reviewed the curriculum and time allocations for the different subjects. With the exception of a continuing shortage of time for history and geography in Year 7, all other issues have been resolved. The school has taken careful consideration of the relevance of the Key Stage 4 curriculum to the whole range of pupils and has made good decisions about increasing vocational opportunities. These contribute well to ensuring that as many pupils as possible can gain accreditation for their learning. The individual mentoring arrangements for Key Stage 4 pupils and their involvement in setting and reviewing targets for their own progress contributes well to a strong learning ethos.

29. Pupils across the school are well supported by the personal, social and moral education curriculum, which very effectively promotes confidence, a sense of respect, and effective self-review and communication skills. Visits, such as the recent one to Germany, and visitors to the school add variety and first hand experience to the curriculum. The provision for careers education and guidance is very good, particularly in Key Stage 4. Together with the work experience programme and range of opportunities linked to local businesses and the community at large, this prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education and for adult life.

30. The sixth form centre provides a rich and varied curriculum for its students, both within and beyond the classroom. It continues to develop a wide spectrum of additional GCSE, A Level and GNVQ courses, giving students a high quality of choice and opportunity. There are effective plans to make further developments to the sixth form curriculum although most students do not have access to religious education. The thorough involvement of students in setting targets for their own progress and in evaluating the results contributes well to high standards and to a very strong learning ethos in the sixth form.

31. The provision of extra-curricular activities is very good and a strength of the school. A very good range of opportunities enhances pupils' learning experience and personal development. Pupils have access to activities prior to the start of the school day, as well as at lunchtimes and after school. Sporting activities are excellent in both quality and range, with many opportunities for inter-school competition. There is also excellent recreational

provision for the older students.

32.Planning for the curriculum is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form centre. There are effective long and medium term plans for most subjects. Information and communication technology is now effectively planned into subject areas in Key Stage 3, but this is at too early a stage of implementation for its success to be judged.

33.There is a coherent, whole-school assessment system, which involves centralised records used to monitor pupils' performance and progress across all subjects. It provides departments with useful data to inform planning for the curriculum and target setting at both departmental and individual level. This process is very effective in the sixth form, where it forms a fundamental part of the learning process and is recognised as such by staff, students and parents alike. There are weaknesses in the practice of the design and technology, geography and religious education departments in Key Stage 3, but with these exceptions, the systems in the main school are good overall. Senior tutors play a key role in ensuring the coherence of this system, and make a very good contribution to individual pupils' progress by their persistence and commitment. The individual mentoring arrangements for pupils and students have proved successful. Assessment of pupils with special educational needs, including those with statements, is good. Appropriate targets for the development of basic and personal skills are set and reviewed. Satisfactory use is made of assessment information to plan the curriculum at both whole school and subject level, though practice is inconsistent. There are instances of good practice, for example in the particularly careful use of assessment information in English to place pupils in groups according to their attainment and guide the deployment of staff. The arrangement has resulted in significant improvement in standards for the pupils concerned

34.In Key Stage 4, about a quarter of the pupils have been disappplied from some aspects of the National Curriculum to follow work-related learning programmes. This provision is effective and offers students a broader programme that promotes better attitudes to learning and motivation. The programme includes the ASDAN Bronze Youth Achievement Award, Foundation level GNVQs, Northern Partnership for Record of Achievement, and NVQ level 1 units. In addition, a GCSE Keyboard Applications course is offered in school, and results are well above average.

34. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

35.The school's provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good. For cultural development it is satisfactory, but for spiritual development it is unsatisfactory. The last inspection report indicated a satisfactory standard overall. The present inspection finds standards overall to be good. Provision has improved as a result of better range and quality of some aspects

36.The spiritual dimension is under-developed in the school. Assemblies continue to be secular in character, and spiritual themes are insufficiently promoted in some subjects. Nevertheless, the spiritual dimension and reflection on values feature at a satisfactory or better level in religious education, art, sociology and physical education where pupils and students are encouraged to reflect on a range of religious beliefs and traditions or the work of famous artists and people or the wonder of the workings of the human body in sport and physical activity. The programme for personal, social and moral education includes elements that focus on care, respect, values and the expression of feelings.

37. Pupils' moral development is very well supported by a policy for behaviour and discipline that is effectively applied. The personal, social and moral education programme is relevant and well implemented. Pupils are made well aware of moral and behavioural expectations through a code of conduct, which is prominently displayed, recognition and use of sanctions. The recently introduced change from exclusion to internal isolation is helping many pupils to realise that the effort required for good personal conduct is preferable to a very undesirable sanction. Moral aspects are also very well promoted by the example of teachers and tutors. Pupils widen their understanding of moral principles through discussions in subjects such as history, where they evaluate major events and the impact on society of key people in the past.

38. The provision for pupils' social development is very good, because pupils gain understanding through personal involvement. The programme for personal, social and moral education makes a considerable contribution, for example in promoting citizenship. The range of extra-curricular activities, educational excursions, travel abroad and work experience contributes further to very good experiences for pupils. Involvement in numerous community-based projects is a strength of the school. Such projects provide excellent opportunities for voluntary service and the building of social bridges within the community. They allow pupils to contribute to the improvement of the quality of social life in the school's immediate locality. Within school, there are many opportunities within subjects for paired and group work. Pupils offer support to others, for example by the evaluation of their efforts. Pupils often take responsibility for their own education by choosing to take part in extra studies or in one of the several homework clubs.

39. The provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory overall. They learn much about their own cultural heritage through literary studies, history and particularly through investigative projects in the community such as mining and the countryside. Cultural awareness develops well in art, and there are useful contributions in music, drama and food technology. However, awareness of the lifestyles of peoples of other ethnic origins is less well developed. Whilst some pupils' awareness of other cultures benefits from travel abroad, there are limited opportunities to visit, for example, the places of worship of different faiths or for meeting people of differing origins.

39. Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

40. The school's provision for pupils' support, guidance and welfare is very good. It contributes to standards achieved and pupils' personal development. Improvements have been achieved since the last inspection in the quality of academic guidance in the main school; there is now a designated person responsible for child protection in the sixth form; health and safety procedures are mostly effective. Parents are pleased with the quality of support and guidance offered by the school.

41. Pupils are kept very well informed about their academic performance through the system of assessment and individual counselling. They agree targets with their teachers and tutors for improvement and achievement. A system of half-termly review and counselling enables pupils to focus clearly on raising their standards. The system is also applied very effectively in the sixth form.

42. A wide and very good range of extra support is available to pupils. This includes homework clubs, some of which are subject specific, together with individual mentoring. There are arrangements for paired reading, an examination preparation club, a summer literacy scheme and a series of projects and award schemes. The school has received the Prince's Trust Award for the quality of its study support provision. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported, and individual educational plans are effectively used. Homework diaries are a well used tool in all years, including the sixth form, and they are closely monitored.

43. The policy for behaviour and discipline is consistently applied. The positive strategies for recognition and rewards are mostly effective. The previous policy of exclusion was not entirely effective, and has been replaced with a policy of inclusion, whereby pupils remain in school but work in isolation. Early signs indicate that the measure is proving to be successful in reducing exclusion and improving standards of behaviour.

44. The programme for personal, social and moral education includes all relevant topics and is appropriate to the needs of pupils, for example by emphasising the value of healthy lifestyles. There is good input from external agencies to support the programme. Pupils receive very good guidance about subject choices, and the quality of careers education and guidance, including work experience, is very good. Sixth form students are also very well supported. Speakers from higher education, input from further education colleges, and individual counselling are examples of how students are given every opportunity to make informed choices.

45. The necessity for good attendance is promoted through teaching in the personal, social and moral education programme, charts in classrooms, certificates of recognition and other strategies. Completion of registers is generally satisfactory, but some are left open too long. Whilst monitoring is effective, the lack of a computerised system causes inefficient use of time in data collection and calculation.

46. Relationships between staff and pupils are constructive and very supportive. They contribute to a positive learning environment and pupils' personal development. Pastoral care is effectively provided through the tutor system. Child protection is well managed, and procedures are understood and adhered to. The school receives good support from many external agencies and county services, and extra help through contributions from the single regeneration budget.

47. Most health and safety matters are effectively managed. First aid cover is adequate. Fire drills are not conducted sufficiently frequently, nor early enough in the school year.

47. Partnership with parents and the community

48. The school's partnership with its parents is good, and its involvement with the community is very strong. Overall, the effects on pupils' attainment are good and on their personal development they are very good. This represents a clear improvement since the last inspection. At the registered inspector's meeting with parents and through questionnaires, parents expressed very positive views and support for the school. Very few concerns were

expressed. They are very happy with the quality of support given to pupils, and they regard the sixth form centre as excellent.

49. Parents are well informed about the life and work of the school and pupils' progress by a range of reports, newsletters and opportunities to meet teachers and discuss their children's progress. The information provided prior to joining and continuously throughout the school meets parents' needs at appropriate times, for example concerning subject choices and careers guidance. Annual school reports comply with requirements, and include pupils' self-evaluative comments for each subject and their targets for improvement. Nevertheless, a few parents would like to be better informed in advance about what is to be taught in school.

50. Involvement in the community is a strength of the school. The immediate community is very well used for the purpose of special studies, educational visits and a good range of extra-curricular activities. Use of community facilities extends further afield to include travel in Europe, exchange arrangements and visits from European students.

51. The county authority prioritises part of the school's catchment area for social improvement, and the community and school are able to apply for support from a regeneration budget. School and pupils are involved in numerous community-based projects, which promote not only pupils' personal development and sense of community but also contribute to the development of the quality of community life. The Youth Challenge initiative is an example of this. Numerous organisations use the school premises and facilities every evening and at the weekend. These facilities include adult education opportunities, and the school is very much an integral part of the community.

52. The school enjoys very good support from employers. They provide work experience for pupils and opportunities for them to research for their coursework. Ambassadors from businesses make themselves available to pupils for questioning as part of pupils' careers education and guidance.

53. Links with primary schools are effective, with thorough and sensitive arrangements for pupils' transfer. Curricular links for enhancement and continuity of education are well developed, and there are many opportunities for inter-school activities.

54. The sixth form centre is also used well by the community. Students volunteer to undertake forms of community service and assist pupils in the main school, for example with reading. Good links with other educational institutions enable students to make informed choices about further and higher education.

54. THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

54. Leadership and management

55. The headteacher provides good quality and strong leadership. He, the governing body and senior management team have established a clear educational direction for the school. The governing body is very supportive of the school. It has developed its strategic leadership role and holds the school to account for its standards and provision. However, the governing body does not fulfil its statutory obligations with respect to the provision of religious

education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship.

56.The headteacher and senior managers take a strategic overview and have a very clear focus on school improvement. Management activity on the two sites is well co-ordinated and very effective in maintaining a corporate view of the development and improvement of the school as a whole.

57.Subject leadership is good in most departments. It is very good in English, but unsatisfactory in geography, history and religious education, and poor in modern foreign languages. The overall leadership and management of provision for pupils with special educational needs is good, and the special educational needs policy has a direct and positive impact on these pupils' attainment and progress.

58.The school's strategic improvement plan is based on a shared understanding of how to bring about improvement of provision and raise standards, and how the resources available may be used to work to this end. The plan is good because it has a clear sense of purpose and focuses directly on the key issues to which the school needs to give attention. The key priorities to sustain improvements have been clearly identified within the plan, and the essential links between targets, resource planning and staff development have been made.

59.Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of provision and standards are good. The arrangements, including external support, are comprehensive and rigorous. The headteacher, senior managers and local authority advisers have visited lessons and prepared evaluative reports for those departments visited. There is very effective monitoring of curriculum planning. Pupils' work and performance data is analysed in great depth, and results are used effectively as part of the monitoring process and increasingly as a tool in the target setting processes established in the school.

60.The headteacher, governing body and senior management, including senior tutors, ensure the effective implementation of the school's aims, values and policies through their work with pupils and students, with parents and staff and external agencies.

61.The ethos for learning, high standards and continual school improvement is very good. There is a shared learning culture in the school, with a clear commitment to learning and the achievement of high standards. There is a sense of common purpose in most departments. Expectations of pupils' attitudes, behaviour, attainment and progress are consistently high.

61. Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

62.There is good range of suitably qualified and experienced teachers in the school overall to teach the curriculum, although there are weaknesses in staffing in geography. Where there are some non-specialists, for example in science and in Post 16 physical education, they are well supported by the faculties. There is a good range of teaching experience with a balance of longer serving members of staff to relatively new entrants to the profession. Due to the staffing bonus provided by the large sixth form the pupil teacher ratio is well below average for similar schools and this is having a positive impact on the progress pupils make in the main school.

63. Pupils are well supported by special educational needs staff, but the number of learning support assistants is low in comparison to the number of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs. Most teachers receive good support from technical staff, particularly in information and communications technology and science. The modern languages faculty benefits from two language assistants. There is a shortfall of technical support in design and technology, and there is a lack of technical support in art at the sixth form centre. Administrative and office staff provide effective support to ensure the smooth running of the school on a daily basis.

64. There are good arrangements for the professional development of staff. The school has a very good induction and support programme for new staff and, in conjunction with the local education authority, there is a formal programme for newly qualified teachers. The first cycle of staff appraisal was completed, but the second cycle of formal appraisal is on hold. However, some informal appraisal occurs in some faculties, for example in information and communication technology. In-service training procedures are very well organised, and priorities are matched to whole-school development and improvement issues as well as to specific faculty needs. Administrative staff have their own appraisal system in place to aid the smooth running of the newly created administrative faculty.

65. Since the last inspection, specialist staffing provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved, as has the deployment of staff across both the sites. Allocation of non-teaching time now more closely matches the range of staff responsibilities. Technical support has improved in information and communication technology.

66. Both sites are well cared for by staff, pupils and students. The premises manager and his staff ensure the buildings are very clean and tidy. Repairs and maintenance are efficiently organised, and the school has a rolling programme for improvement of accommodation.

67. Overall, the quality of accommodation on both sites is satisfactory for the effective delivery of the curriculum, but there are some shortcomings. History accommodation in the main building is limited, as is music provision. In the sixth form centre, history rooms are small and crowded, and the range of indoor specialist physical education facilities is inadequate. Effective and informative displays in and around classrooms include examples of pupils' and students' work, which enhance their learning experience. At present, neither site is fully accessible to anyone who needs a wheelchair. At the sixth form centre, the edges of stairs are highlighted in yellow and black stripes to aid those with visual impairment.

68. Resources to support pupils and students' learning are of a good standard overall. Information and communication technology resources across the school support the learning of all pupils and students. However, there is insufficient hardware and software in music to enhance and support pupils' learning.

69. Both sites have good quality resource centres, staffed by knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff. This provision is enhanced by bright and attractive displays. Information and communication technology provision in the sixth form resource centre is good, with access to the Internet available to support students' learning. The stock is continually being updated and the classification of books has recently been changed to the system used in higher education libraries, thus preparing students well for the next stage of their education. Both resource centres are well used by pupils and students throughout the day, as well as before

and after school.

70.The numbers and quality of books and resources across subjects is sufficient for the curriculum on offer. There are good quality careers libraries at both sites. Nevertheless, there are some shortcomings. Learning resources are unsatisfactory in art, and in music there is currently no recording equipment, which limits methods of teaching and assessment.

71.Since the last inspection, funding for resources has continued to be well spent. The number and quality of books in the resource centres has improved, and information and communication technology provision has improved at both sites.

71. The efficiency of the school

72.The school makes efficient and effective use of its resources. The organisation of the school timetable on the split site makes effective use of teaching and support staff. Specialist teaching and support staff are effectively deployed. The use of teaching staff is good overall, but it is unsatisfactory in geography where there is an over-reliance on part-time and supply staff. The staffing bonus provided to the main school by the very large sixth form is used very effectively to create smaller teaching groups in Key Stage 3. This has a very beneficial effect on pupils' learning, securing increased rates of progress and personal development. The use of tutorial time is good. The use of support staff is well planned and effectively targeted across the curriculum. Overall, the impact of support provided is good because teachers understand well how to use the support effectively. The use of learning resources and accommodation is generally good.

73.There are regular, minuted meetings of the governing body's finance sub-committee. Governors receive half-termly budget monitoring information and have appropriate oversight of the budget. They hold the school to account for the cost effectiveness of budgetary decisions made at senior manager and middle manager levels. The day-to-day management of the budget is undertaken by senior staff and is very effective. School finances are well managed, and matters raised in the 1999 audit have been appropriately dealt with.

74.The school has held a budget surplus in recent years, but this has been on a planned basis for the purpose of enhancing the accommodation and fabric of the school. Successful examples of such planning are the new art suite and science laboratory in the main school.

75.The school's strategic improvement plan and the departmental plans include detailed costings and time-scales for the various activities. The departmental plans are related to departmental capitation. There are clear evaluation criteria for monitoring progress and evaluating the success and effectiveness of all these plans as a means of promoting improvement. Finances are very closely targeted on the priorities for improvement, particularly in the areas of staff development and the improvement of learning resources.

76.The expenditure per pupil is high when compared with similar schools nationally. The proportion of the school's income spent on teachers is high and the expenditure on support staff is low. The grant provided to support professional development is used strategically to support school improvement. The effectiveness of its use is evaluated as part of the school

monitoring processes.

77. Taking account of the improving standards of attainment, especially in Key Stage 3 and the very high standards in the sixth form, the good progress of most pupils throughout the school, the substantial proportion of high quality teaching, even with the high expenditure per pupil, the school provides good value for money.

77.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

77. ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

77. English

78. In 1997 and 1998, the school's Key Stage 3 results were close to the national average. In 1999, results at Level 5 and above were above average in comparison with similar schools, though the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above fell from that in 1998, when the results were well above those achieved by similar schools. The trend over the past three years shows girls' results close to the national average while those of boys are marginally below. This represents significant value added when compared to attainment on entry.

79. At Key Stage 4 in 1998, the percentage of pupils gaining GCSE grades A*- C in English Language was above the average for all schools and well above the average in comparison with similar schools. In 1999, however, the percentage gaining GCSE grades A*- C in English Language was well below the national average and below the average of similar schools. While results have fluctuated according to the cohort in each of the past six years, in each of the past four years the pass rate at A*- G grades has been 100 per cent. In English Literature GCSE, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*- C has remained above the national average in three out of the past four years. It was well above the national average in 1999 from a smaller entry than that for Language. Girls performed significantly better than boys in 1999.

80. In the sixth form, the results achieved at A Level are consistently high and show a rising trend, in both Literature and Language, over the past four years. In English Literature, the pass rate has been 100 per cent in the past four years. The percentage of pupils achieving the top two grades has averaged over 44 per cent, with four out of five students currently achieving the top three grades. In English Language, a third of students, on average, achieve the two top grades, and currently four out of five achieve the top three grades. Performance in English A Levels is consistently favourable when compared with other subject areas.

81. Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 make good progress in English. Students of English in the Sixth form make very good progress. In the main school, the progress made by pupils is sometimes adversely affected by attendance problems, but it represents very good progress for a significant minority that they reach nationally expected levels at the end of both key stages. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in English throughout the school. This is brought about by a combination of close adherence to well targeted individual education plans, good curriculum planning and timetabled additional setting and support in Year 9.

82. In speaking and listening, pupils' performance in the main school is usually satisfactory and often good. Pupils in all years listen attentively to the subject or point of view under discussion. In group, pair or individual work, they are able to sustain opinion and extend responses to take account of additional information. As they move up the school, they begin to develop their speaking skills and employ an increasing range and repertoire of language. As a result, by Key Stage 4, the majority can use a variety of formal and informal language to articulate considered views. Pupils take full advantage of the many opportunities offered in English to develop oral skills. In the sixth form, oral abilities are of a very high order, and are

characterised by mature, sophisticated personal reflection on a range of challenging themes and issues.

83. Standards of reading are satisfactory, overall, throughout the main school. For pupils in the top sets in Years 8 and 9, they are good. The majority of pupils read with fluency and due regard for the listener. These qualities are in large measure a reflection of the significant additional input into reading in the main school. Initiatives include sixth form paired reading help and the well organised provision of an excellent range of good fiction and non-fiction in the resource centre. Reading skills are soundly and enthusiastically promoted for all abilities. Pupils in Key Stage 4 are increasingly good at selecting, analysing and evaluating key points and themes in literary and other texts. Pupils value reading as an activity, and are willing to share preferences and reveal favourites to peers. Students in the sixth form are expert scrutineers of complex texts, seen and unseen.

84. Writing standards overall are unsatisfactory. Many pupils write extended narrative well, but spelling, punctuation and other errors in technical accuracy persist in each key stage. Evidence from the scrutiny of pupils' work in lessons and from a representative sample shows that pupils' choice of descriptors and other words is often adventurous. Work is nearly always presented neatly and handwriting is clear and legible, but control of sentence structure and paragraphing is less strong. Pupils' work in the top sets in Key Stage 4 engages the reader's interest, but few pupils can sustain work at the highest levels. In contrast, the written work of the majority of students in the sixth form is engaging, stimulating and of a very high quality, even at the beginning of their studies.

85. Across the curriculum, reading skills enable pupils to access a range of subjects with reasonable facility. Borrowing levels are high in the excellent resource centres located in both sites. However, writing, especially extended writing, is insufficiently and inconsistently developed across all subjects. There is good practice in areas such as the creative arts and science, but less so in modern foreign languages. Elements of good practice seen in, for example, physical education included the frequent display of key words and subject terminology. Pupils' oral skills are well catered for in many subject areas, except where teacher-dominated methods result in pupils' not talking through problems for themselves.

86. Almost all pupils' attitudes to learning in English lessons are at least good. Pupils behave well and are obedient, polite and cheerful. There is a small amount of challenging behaviour, but this is very effectively countered, not only by a consistent application of policy but through the high quality of teacher-pupil relationships in general. Most pupils work hard, give of their best and take pride in their work. Respect for others is seen at all levels. In sixth form lessons, attitudes and engagement in work are never less than very good and they are often exemplary.

87. The quality of teaching in English is never less than satisfactory. In the great majority of lessons it is good or better. Seven out of eight lessons in Key Stage 3 and five out of six lessons in Key Stage 4 are at least good. Six out of ten lessons across all phases are very good with some outstanding features. There is outstanding teaching in all phases. All teaching in the sixth form is at least good. The level of teachers' knowledge and its application to the subject and the level of teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities are very high in the main school. Teachers' subject knowledge is outstanding in the sixth form. All other aspects of teaching are at least good in both key stages and the sixth form. Teachers

manage pupils' behaviour and the learning environment very well. Assessment is satisfactory in Key Stage 3; it is good in Key Stage 4 and very good in the sixth form. All these aspects are underpinned by good planning in all years. Homework is used very effectively to enhance and support pupils' learning in Key Stages 3 and 4, and its use in the sixth form is outstanding.

88. The head of faculty provides outstanding leadership and direction for English. Issues from the last inspection have been successfully addressed, and there are clear targets and priorities for future action. The use of assessment data, the policy for assessment, and the efficient day-to-day organisation of all resources are additional major strengths. All of this contributes to the outstandingly positive ethos created in English, reflected in the very good relationships and a strong commitment to high achievement for all.

88.

88. **Mathematics**

89. Attainment overall in mathematics is below the national average at the end of both Key Stages. Attainment in the sixth form A Level is above the national average.

90. The level of attainment in mathematics of pupils entering Year 7 is rising each year, but it remains low. In 1999, 43 per cent of pupils failed to achieve the expected level (Level 4) at the end of Key Stage 2. Over the period 1996 to 1998, results at the end of Key Stage 3 have been below the national average, but in line with those of similar schools nationally. In 1999, results were just below the national average with regard to those achieving Level 5 and above, but they were significantly below with regard to those achieving Level 6. Boys performed better than girls, a situation not reflected nationally, although this difference was apparent in these pupils' performances in the 1996 national tests at the end of Key Stage 2.

91. In 1999, the number of pupils gaining GCSE grades A*- C was below the national average, but above the average of similar schools. GCSE results over the period 1996 to 1999 have fluctuated according to the cohort profile and have been either below or near to the national averages for pupils achieving either A*- C or A*- G grades. There is little difference between the performances of boys and girls. The mathematics results are nearer to the averages for other subjects in the school than is found nationally. A small number of pupils in Year 11 have done well in Certificate of Achievement assessments as an alternative to the GCSE.

92. The levels of attainment shown in external tests and examinations are demonstrated in the lessons seen and in the written work examined. Number work is the main weakness shown by pupils entering the school. Although this improves, many pupils show a poorer grasp of computational skills at the end of Key Stage 3 than found nationally. This limits their ability to cope with number skills in topics such as probability and statistics, and affects attainment in subjects such as science, where a significant number of pupils have little real feel for number, especially when estimating. In contrast, many pupils show confidence in applying their knowledge of fractions in music. Pupils use calculators sensibly when appropriate. Spatial work is stronger than number, with many pupils achieving average levels of attainment at the end of each Key Stage, especially with angles, symmetry and trigonometry. There are especially good applications in art. Pupils can use a range of measures, choose appropriate units, and measure with confidence in mathematics and other subjects, such as art and design

and technology. Good use is made of graphs in mathematics and a range of other subjects. Investigation work at each key stage allows pupils to show good skills in the use and application of mathematics. This leads to well presented written work. Special education needs pupils are well supported in class. They are able to successfully meet mathematical targets identified in their individual education plans.

93. Standards in A Level classes are above average, with students showing particularly good understanding in statistics and graphical work. These standards are shown in examinations, where results are above the national average. Many students successfully improve their GCSE grades by following a well-designed re-sit course.

94. From the very low base on entry, pupils make good progress through the school, even though their overall standards are still below the national averages at the end of each key stage. Detailed assessment and monitoring of individual pupils shows that significant value is added between Year 7 and Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Students in the sixth form make good progress, and significant value is added to their achievements in mathematics.

95. At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils show good responses to their learning and maintain good levels of concentration and application. They are well behaved, attentive and interested in their work. They co-operate well in pairs and when doing practical activities. Pupils show initiative in investigation work. Relationships are very good. Students in the sixth form show high levels of commitment and motivation, interest in their work, and very good attitudes to the subject.

96. The overall quality of teaching is at least satisfactory, with many good features. It is at least good in seven out of eleven lessons in Key Stage 3 and good in three out of six lessons in Key Stage 4. All teaching in the sixth form was good. Lessons are well planned, resources are sensibly used, and expectations are well matched to the needs of individual pupils and students. Class management is good. Although teachers show a good overall knowledge and understanding of the subject at each stage, their awareness of effective methods for improving pupils' number skills is less well developed. Mental work is under-emphasised in all years. In contrast, the planning and organisation of investigation work is very good. Lower attaining pupils, and those with special educational needs, are well supported by individual help in class and by the setting of appropriate tasks. Higher attaining pupils are suitably challenged. There is no evidence of the over-didactic approaches in the sixth form as reported in the last inspection. Marking of work is up-to-date, positive and informative to pupils and students.

97. The subject is well led by a very experienced teacher. There is a commitment to raising standards of attainment. When the school has established effective techniques for improving the number skills of pupils in all years, it will be well placed to take part in the national extension of the Numeracy Strategy for Key Stage 3 pupils.

98. Standards in mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4 have declined since the last inspection, but standards at A Level have improved. However, there have been significant improvements elsewhere, and the school is adding significant value to pupils' attainment from the low baseline on entry to Year 7. The quality of teaching has improved, and more able pupils are now more appropriately challenged.

98. Science

99. Overall standards of attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4 are below national expectations. Pupils' performance, as shown by the percentage of pupils attaining the expected level (Level 5) and above in the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 tests, is slightly below the national average, but well above that of pupils in similar schools. However, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard (Level 6) and above is well below both the national average and that of pupils from similar backgrounds. There has been a steady improvement in performance in the end of Key Stage 3 tests over the last three years.

100. In 1999, the percentage of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*- C was below the national average for all schools, but broadly in line with that in similar schools. The proportion of pupils who achieved grades A*- G was broadly in line with the national average. The school has made good progress since the last inspection in increasing the proportion of pupils entered for GCSE science who achieve a pass grade. At A Level, the proportions of pupils achieving a pass grade and those achieving the higher grades (A and B) are consistently in line with the national figures in all three sciences.

101. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work show that the attainment of most pupils at the end of both key stages is below national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils are able to use the particle theory of matter to explain the behaviour of materials, and relate the structures of some living cells to their specialised functions. Higher attaining pupils are able to use abstract ideas such as chemical symbols and formulae. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils are able to calculate physical quantities accurately, and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of nutrient cycles and their role in cycling materials through the environment. Students in A Level classes show a good knowledge and understanding of the conceptual demands of their subjects. In biology, for example, they demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the mechanisms of inheritance and the chemistry of cell processes. In chemistry, they are able to explain chemical reactions in terms of electron structure and its relation to chemical bonding. In physics, they are able to calculate the sizes of a number of forces acting at a point.

102. Pupils make good progress through the school to GCSE and in the sixth form. The majority of pupils enter the school with standards of attainment well below the national average at the end of Key Stage 2, but the school adds significant value to their achievements at all stages. Almost all pupils make at least satisfactory gains in knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts and the skills of scientific investigation. Through Key Stage 4 and in A Level courses, the schemes of work are firmly based upon the examination syllabuses, which helps to ensure good progress. There is no significant difference in the rate of progress between the different knowledge and content areas of the National Curriculum programmes of study at Key Stages 3 and 4. Although pupils with special educational needs are often provided with the same level of work as other pupils in the group, the level and quality of support that they receive in lessons enables them to make good progress.

103. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards learning in science, and the behaviour of almost all pupils is good or very good. The high quality of attitudes and behaviour contributes to the pace of learning through lessons and to the progress that pupils make. Pupils are often enthusiastic in science lessons, particularly during practical and other group work. Almost all pupils are able to take responsibility for aspects of their learning,

particularly during practical activities, where they share tasks and discuss their work. The relationships between pupils are good. They respect the work and ideas of others, and are supportive of those who find problems with their work.

104.The quality of teaching in science is good in all key stages. It is very good or excellent in over half of lessons. In Key Stages 3 and 4 three out of four lessons are good. In the sixth form four out of five lessons are very good. Teachers demonstrate a very good knowledge of science, placing emphasis on correct use of scientific terms and using examples from everyday life to capture pupils' interest and develop their understanding. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly in terms of their content and intended activities, but they rarely identify in their plans the learning targets for the lesson or explain these to the class at the beginning. Good use is made of homework to extend and reinforce learning and to check on progress. Teachers make effective use of questioning to develop understanding and to check on the progress of individuals through the course of lessons. Teachers organise resources well, and make effective use of time so that pupils are engaged in learning activities through the whole of the lesson time. The effective management of pupils, together with the good attitudes and high quality of relationships, contribute to the progress and attainment of pupils. There are high expectations of pupils in almost all lessons.

105.The department is well led. The shared commitment to high standards, together with the positive learning atmosphere in the department, makes an effective contribution to standards. Assessment and monitoring of the progress of pupils is good, and this has developed well since the last inspection. The resources for teaching science are good, and the recently refurbished laboratories provide a suitable environment for the teaching and learning of science.

105. OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

105. Information technology

106.By the end of both key stages, pupils' attainment is in line with national expectations for information and communications technology. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils can word-process, use spreadsheets and desktop publish effectively. Their skills in measuring, modelling and control are less well developed. At Key Stage 4, attainment is better than national expectations in keyboarding applications. In the sixth form, students studying A level computer subjects and GNVQ attain above national expectations. Over time, there has been a notable raising of attainment.

107.Progress is good in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form, and it is satisfactory in Key Stage 4. Across the key stages, pupils make good progress in communicating and handling information. The lack of suitable equipment is hampering progress in measuring and control. GNVQ students in the sixth form make very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, more slowly than other pupils.

108.Attitudes and behaviour are good. Pupils show interest in their work and are excited by the new technology. There is a purposeful working ethos. Relationships between pupils and teachers are good and constructive.

109.The overall quality of teaching is good. Three out of five lessons in Key Stage 3 are good and all teaching in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is good. The quality of teaching is good in the discrete information and communication technology periods, but it is less strong in other subjects. Specialist information and communication technology teachers' knowledge and understanding of both the subject content and how to teach it is good. Teachers set high expectations of effort behaviour and work standards. Their planning is consistently good with learning objectives clearly identified and shared with the pupils at the beginning of lessons. Teachers manage the pupils and the learning environment well and they achieve good standards of discipline and effort. Teaching methods and class organisation is very effective and work is well matched to the needs of the pupils at all levels of competence. Teachers use question and answer sessions very well to motivate pupils and enhance their learning. Homework is used satisfactorily in Key Stages 3 and 4 and is a strong feature in the sixth form.

110.Many departments are contributing to information and communication technology as a result of considerable staff training, and this input is having a positive effect on teaching. Information and communication technology is being delivered in English, learning support, physical education, modern foreign languages, technology, history and is developing in science, mathematics and art. It is under developed in religious education, geography and music.

111.The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Departments assess Key Stage 3 attainment, and levels are collated for reporting to parents by the co-ordinator. There is extra-curricular provision and pupils readily use the facilities available. Hardware and software provision is good, though some minor difficulties with the new network need to be addressed. Computers in the Resource Centre in the main school are not networked and so are under used.

112.Leadership and management within the department are good. Information and communication technology support is given to teachers in other subjects, there is a high level of in-service training, and resources are well maintained.

112. Religious education

113.By Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils attain levels that are average against the expectations of the local agreed syllabus. The percentage of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-C has improved since the last inspection and was well above the national average in 1999, although the number of entries was small and so the results do not give a reliable profile of attainment over time. In GCE A Level examinations, the percentage of pupils achieving grades A-B and grades A-E declined in 1998, but improved in 1999 when the average point score also improved to a level similar to that achieved in 1997. A significantly larger number of girls take the subject, and their performance is better than the boys in most years.

114.In Key Stage 3, attainment in lessons is broadly in line with the expectations in the local agreed syllabus, although it is below for lower attaining pupils. Pupils understand the key features of the Muslim faith, the significance of rites of passage, and what constitutes

belief. They can explore the beliefs of others in their study of ideas about God and how people live out their faith in Britain today. They develop their knowledge and understanding of a range of symbols, festivals and ways of worship drawn mainly from the study of Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

115. In Key Stage 4, all pupils now follow a short course in religious studies. Pupils' attainment in lessons in the early stages is just below national expectations. Attainment is below expectations in Year 11, and few pupils are likely to achieve a grade C or above. Pupils can describe the problems of evil and the response of different faiths to suffering and the moral issues that arise. They can present arguments for and against the existence of God and the origins of life. Their grasp of the basic knowledge is barely adequate, and their attainment is underdeveloped in terms of understanding and the skills to present arguments and reflect on religious issues.

116. In A Level lessons, attainment is satisfactory. Students have a sound grasp of many aspects of the Christian faith, including the liturgical movement, the development of Pentecostalism, and arguments for the existence of God.

117. In Key Stage 3, all pupils make satisfactory progress. In Key Stage 4 progress for high attaining pupils is satisfactory, but it is unsatisfactory for average and lower attaining pupils because they are not producing enough work of quality to meet the requirements of the GCSE course. The overall progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, although their weak literacy skills inhibit their potential to progress faster, which the attitude of most of them deserves. All students on the A Level course make good progress.

118. Most pupils have a positive attitude to the subject, and this is particularly evident in the sixth form. Pupils are interested to find out about religions, although they are less assured in expressing what they are learning personally. Too often pupils are passively compliant rather than actively interested. Nearly all pupils show respect for the values and beliefs of other pupils and of people whose religious background is different to their own. They listen attentively and generally concentrate well on tasks set, although this was not consistently the case, particularly for lower attaining pupils. Pupils work well together, although opportunities to show initiative and take responsibility are limited because of teaching styles used in Key Stages 3 and 4. In the sixth form, students respond very well to the demands of the course and are very well motivated. Relationships between pupils and with staff are mainly good. There are instances of poor behaviour, particularly by boys, but overall behaviour is satisfactory and good in a few lessons.

119. The quality of teaching overall is unsatisfactory. There is some good teaching in the sixth form and the majority of teaching is satisfactory. However, there is unsatisfactory teaching in two out of five lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are usually secure, but there are exceptions such as when Darwinian theory is referred to as proof of evolution. Teachers' expectations are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form, but unsatisfactory in Key Stage 4 because not enough emphasis is put on critical thinking and reflection. Teachers' planning is based on the departmental planning framework. In most lessons, clear learning outcomes are identified, although these are not always adequately explained to pupils. A satisfactory range of learning activities is planned in all Key Stages. On a few occasions, teacher input is too dominant at the expense of pupils expressing their own ideas and opinions. The management of pupils is good in the sixth form, but overall it is

unsatisfactory across Key Stages 3 and 4 mainly because of an inconsistent approach to behaviour management and the organisation of pupils' activities. Lesson time is used satisfactorily but without a great sense of urgency, and in too many lessons pupils lack information on time to be spent on completing tasks. Worksheets and tasksheets are generally well prepared. Only a limited range of textbooks and other learning resources were seen in use, an exception being a very good range of artefacts to illustrate the Seder meal in the Jewish Passover. Whilst some teachers use praise and positive comments in lessons, this is insufficient to promote effective learning. Some helpful evaluative comments are made to help pupils improve, and in the sixth form good use is made of assessment to guide students' progress. Homework is not set consistently in Key Stages 3 and 4 and so it makes insufficient contribution to raising levels of achievement. There is a good level of personal study, research and essay writing in the sixth form.

120. Since the last inspection, the allocation of time to the subject has been increased and is now adequate. All pupils now follow a religious education course through Key Stages 3 and 4 but there is still no provision for religious education for all students in the sixth form, except the small number following an A Level course. In the long-term absence of the head of department, the co-ordination of the subject is inadequate to ensure good quality provision. Currently leadership and support for teaching and curriculum development is poor. Some development planning has taken place, but the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. The clear priorities for action identified by the school are to establish a committed teaching team, improve the quality of teaching, review the organisation of the curriculum, and establish proper arrangements for the leadership and management of the subject.

Art

121. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is broadly in line with national expectations. The number of pupils gaining grades A*- C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was similar to the national average. All pupils gained grades within the A*- G range, with girls significantly out-performing boys. The trend in results over the past three years is rising at a faster rate than the rise in national trends. The proportion of students gaining grades A-B in the 1999 A Level examination was above the national average. There is a steadily rising trend in results over the past three years, and a rising number of students is entering for the examination.

122. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils are able to observe the overall shape and proportion of artefacts and natural forms well, though only a minority observe details such as texture and shading, which challenge their drawing skills. They can identify the work of several major artists, such as Picasso, Van Gogh and Dali, and experiment effectively with their styles of painting. They are able to form clay by modelling, slabbing and coiling methods. By the end of Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils control watercolours sensitively, and are able to create the warm, Mediterranean colours used by the artist Andre Derain. Lower attaining pupils lack basic skills and imagination and tend to copy ideas from other pupils, using immature conventions to realise their ideas in composition. Attainment in the sixth form is above national expectations. Students take their clay work to a good standard of finish, using a range of tools at the green stage, and appropriate slips and glazes for the firing. Sketchbooks are used in an exemplary way, combining extended research with

detailed and sustained annotation of a good standard. They explore a wide range of artists and media effectively to stimulate and develop their own ideas. Higher attaining pupils demonstrate a very high level of graphic skill and exceptionally well developed observational skills in their work, in particular in their portrait and illustrative work.

123. Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, and sixth form students make very good progress. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is good. In Key Stage 3, pupils' build well on basic skills learned in previous years, and develop more effective control over line, colour, tone and texture. In Key Stage 4, the majority of pupils make good progress across a wide range of different media, including mod-roc, textiles, clay, collage and multi-media constructions. Sketchbook and portfolio evidence in the sixth form demonstrates students' very good progress in the wide range of examination course work undertaken, particularly in ceramics.

124. Pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. In the sixth form, students' attitudes are very good and often excellent. Most pupils are focussed and industrious and show interest in their work. Pupils and students are generally well behaved, polite and courteous. They take responsibility for the preparation and clearing away of their work. In the sixth form, most students are fully independent learners, who organise, plan and develop their own uniquely individual studies. They are well motivated, reflective and considerate.

125. The quality of teaching overall is good. It is consistently good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and is excellent in two out of three lessons in the sixth form. All teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject, and teach with confidence and enthusiasm. Where teachers have limited experience of teaching, they are not yet secure in the delivery of their subject and lack effective strategies for responding to classroom disruption. Expectations of pupils are high and they are challenged effectively. Teachers make good use of the vocabulary of art in most lessons, and in the sixth form they use high levels of art terminology in their discussions with students. In the best lessons, teachers give good demonstrations of techniques and processes of art. The work of pupils and students is marked regularly, with evaluative comments made in sketchbooks and to pupils and students as they work. Very good use is made of homework to consolidate or extend the class work, in particular in the sixth form.

126. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The department benefits from confident, knowledgeable and hardworking leadership. The head of department has a clear sense of direction for the department and sets high standards. With her knowledgeable and committed team, she has established a high quality and effective learning environment, having steered the department through a very difficult period. The subject makes a very good contribution to the school's provision for the cultural development of pupils and students. The department has made a good response to issues raised in the last inspection report.

126. Design and technology

127. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment overall in design and technology is in line with that expected nationally. In GCSE examinations in 1999, the proportions of pupils gaining grades A*- C and A*- G were below national expectations. The attainment of both boys and girls was below the national expectation in 1998 and 1999, but girls' performance was better than that of boys in both years. In the sixth form, attainment has improved, and in 1999 it was in line with the national average. Attainment is higher in the practical aspects of the subject than it is in designing in all materials, except in graphic products at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, where there are examples of good design work and drawing skills. Drawing and design skills are underdeveloped in both key stages, and there has been little improvement in this area since the last inspection. Knowledge and understanding of materials and of the making process is generally sound, but it is weaker in food technology among younger pupils in Key Stage 3. Pupils' attainment is low when they enter Year 7, but they make good progress across the different subject material areas as they move through the school.

128. Pupils respond well to the work they are given and have a positive attitude towards design and technology. They show interest, application and concentration, and enjoy the work. Relationships with each other and the teacher are good. Pupils often collaborate with each other in their learning, in using equipment and in clearing up at the end of the lessons. Behaviour is usually good. In the instances where behaviour is unsatisfactory, this is due to limited opportunities for pupils to show initiative and take responsibility for their own learning, or to a lack of challenge. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, pupils respond well to the opportunities to do research and make contact with outside agencies for project information.

129. The quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 is sound overall with some good features, and it is very good in two thirds of lessons in the sixth form. Teachers have a sound knowledge and understanding of their subject across the age ranges, but there is variation in the knowledge and understanding of the National Curriculum programmes of study at Key Stage 3. Lesson planning is detailed, with clear learning objectives identified. Class management and organisational strategies are good. Methods of teaching are generally satisfactory. In some lessons, pupils depend too much on the instruction of the teacher. Unsatisfactory use is made of assessment and evaluation of what has been learnt during the lesson to aid and inform teaching and set individual targets. Teachers give appropriate and constructive feedback in lessons, but this would be strengthened if clear targets were identified and written guidance were given to pupils to consider, as a way of raising the standard of their work.

130. The curriculum for design and technology is satisfactory, but the use of information and communication technology in the curriculum is insufficiently developed and limits pupils' attainment in control and electronics, and computer aided manufacture. The leadership and management of the department is sound. The recently appointed head of department is having an impact on change within the department, and is beginning to establish clear educational direction for the subject. Development and action planning and target setting for raising attainment are well set out in the improvement plan. The department has made a good response to issues raised in the last inspection report.

130. Geography

131.The subject has experienced staffing difficulties over the past year, which has affected provision at both the main site and at the sixth form centre. During the week of the inspection, the majority of teaching in Key Stage 3 was undertaken by recently appointed supply staff.

132.In the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments, the majority of pupils attained standards well below those expected nationally. Girls performed slightly better than boys. Results in GCSE examinations in 1999 were well below the national average. In the higher grades A*- C in 1999, boys performed slightly better than girls, but across the whole range of A*- G grades girls did significantly less well. At A Level there is an improving trend in the number of A and B grades, but no clear trend in A-E grades overall. In 1999, results were broadly in line with the national average and show that girls did considerably better than boys.

133.By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils know about some human patterns and processes through their study of the school and its community. They know about physical processes in relation to rivers and different types of erosion, and they have begun to develop an understanding of life in Japan. Fieldwork and mapwork skills are not well developed, and few present work of a suitably high quality. Most pupils have a shallow understanding of the topics they study, and they lack confidence with geographical language. More able pupils, however, demonstrate the potential to achieve high standards when the opportunity is provided. This is too rarely evident in classroom practice. Progress for the vast majority of pupils is unsatisfactory because teaching is unsatisfactory, assessment is not effectively used, and work is not matched to pupils' needs. There is no sense of urgency or of a culture of achievement.

134.By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' achieve standards below those expected nationally. They make satisfactory progress in exploring the concept of urban decline, and relate this to their own knowledge and experience. They understand the impact of unemployment, and some are able to explain the social consequences. Year 10 pupils know about patterns of urban development in Durham, and have made good progress with their understanding of land use. However, pupils' ability to express their views and to commit them to paper is limited by a lack of confidence, inadequate grasp of appropriate language, and limited writing skills.

135.A Level students attain standards in line with those expected nationally and make good progress, though this has been affected recently by staff absence. They develop sound knowledge about the natural environment, and begin to understand the complex relationships that exist between people and the places in which they live. They are developing skill in the use and application of a good range of statistical techniques as part of their individual studies.

136.In the main school, few pupils show interest or inclination to concentrate well, except in a Year 10 class where the dynamic and inclusive approach to teaching gave pupils confidence and the necessary structure to take an active role. The behaviour of sixth form students is exemplary, and that of almost all the pupils on the main site is good. Their relationships with each other are friendly and supportive, and they are able to work well together on a range of tasks. The very few minor disruptions were a result of poorly planned and timed activities that did not engage pupils' interest. In the sixth form and some Key Stage 4 lessons, pupils

and students develop their independent study skills particularly through fieldwork and other coursework assignments. These experiences make a good contribution to learning where they are carefully planned and effectively supported. Attitudes to learning in the sixth form are good. Students take a mature and intelligent interest in their work, and, where opportunity is given, they participate actively in their learning.

137. The quality of teaching varies across the school and within each key stage, including the sixth form. It is good in three out of five lessons in the sixth form, it is satisfactory in Key Stage 4 and unsatisfactory in three out of four lessons in Key Stage 3. It is good where the teacher plans with specific pupils or students in mind, provides a demanding but achievable standard of everyone, and uses a strong enquiry-based approach that involves active participation. Too frequently in geography lessons there is a slow pace and expectations are inappropriate. Questioning is too rarely used as a means of checking on pupils' understanding. There are too few opportunities to explain, analyse or discuss. In most Key Stage 3 lessons, planning took little account of the range of ability in the class or of pupils' previous learning. Time was not well used and the resources were often undemanding and dull. Some good use was made in one lesson of the silting up of the sculpture in Sunderland harbour as part of the work on erosion. This interested pupils and provided a good example that related pupils' learning to their knowledge of the local area.

138. The leadership of geography is unsatisfactory. It is soundly managed at the sixth form centre, but there is no coherent sense of direction or expectation of high standards for the subject across the school. This is a continuing issue from the last inspection. There have been some recent improvements in Key Stage 3, including the provision of a new scheme of work. This now incorporates the requirements of the national curriculum and lays emphasis on an enquiry-based approach, but it is inadequately supported by the poor range of books and materials.

138. History

139. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly in line with national expectations. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, pupils' attainment was above the national averages for those achieving grades A*- C and A*- G. At A Level in 1999, students' attainment was well above the national average, which represents significant value added to students' attainment in history.

140. In Key Stage 3, some pupils are able to research to find information and write it up accurately. Many pupils present diagrams and charts well, with some particularly good desktop publishing of the Marian persecutions in Year 8. In Key Stage 4, many pupils organise their notes efficiently and link causes and results well. In both key stages, pupils' historical vocabulary is a strength, and they are building up information that they fit successfully into an historical context. Highly motivated sixth form students have confidence in handling and evaluating large quantities of material. They have good breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding. Their recall of work covered is very good.

141. At Key Stages 3 and 4, most pupils make sound progress in relation to their prior attainment, and some make good progress. A minority of pupils makes unsatisfactory progress in a few lessons in the main school. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress. Progress in the sixth form is very good. Students use primary sources to support or challenge historical theories, coping very well with the academic demands of historiography.

142. Most pupils' attitudes to their learning are good. They are attentive and settle quickly to work. At times a small minority do not co-operate and they disturb other pupils. In Key Stage 4, many pupils are conscientious and some are ambitious. Sixth form students respond very well to the rigorous demands made of them, increasingly taking more responsibility for their own learning.

143. The quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory, with good features in two out of five lessons in Key Stage 3. Teaching in the sixth form is very good overall. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, and most motivate pupils highly with their knowledge, understanding and enthusiasm for the subject. Lessons are well planned. Teachers employ a variety of appropriate teaching strategies, and work is well matched to the needs of all pupils. Good opportunities are provided for collaborative work. Learning activities are time limited and most lessons have good pace and purpose. More opportunities taken to link the past with present day national and international events would enhance learning. Teachers use external sources very effectively, and expeditions and visits, such as to Hadrian's Wall and Beamish, enhance pupils' learning very well.

144. In the sixth form, the leadership and management of the subject is efficient and innovative. However, there are serious weaknesses in leadership and management in the main school where, because of staff change and illness, no-one is in charge. The department makes effective use of information and communication technology as a tool for learning in history in all key stages. Issues raised in the last inspection report have been satisfactorily addressed.

144. Modern languages

145. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below average. Reported teacher assessments for 1999 show the attainment of both boys and girls to be well below national expectations. Girls do better than boys at the higher levels, which very few boys achieve. The trend of attainment is falling whereas the national trend is rising. There is a significant weakness in the skill of writing. GCSE results for 1999 indicate that attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is below average, especially at the higher grades (A*- C), but also at the full range of grades (A*- G). The attainment of both boys and girls is below the national averages in French and German, and in German the attainment of boys is very low. Results for 1998 show that results in modern foreign languages were well below the average for all school subjects. Whilst there is no clear trend in French, there is a falling trend in German. Writing remains the weakest skill. The small number of pupils entered for the Certificate of Achievement in 1999 failed to gain grades. Results for A Level in 1999 indicate average attainment in the sixth form. Though there were no very high grades, four fifths of students achieved grades B-E, with half of these at B or C. This represents an improving trend.

146. Observation of lessons and examination of pupils' work confirms the outcomes of public

examinations and internal assessments. At the end of Key Stage 3, few pupils retain sufficient breadth of vocabulary or grammatical structure. Their comprehension is limited, and most pupils' oral and written responses are very brief and lack accuracy. At the end of Key Stage 4, comprehension skills are broadly satisfactory, but most written work remains weak. Pupils lack confidence in oral work and find it difficult to sustain a conversation. In the sixth form, students acquire and apply new vocabulary and grammatical knowledge systematically. In their writing, they give accounts and build arguments incorporating an increasing range of factual and linguistic knowledge. There is a greater range of attainment in comprehension and speaking in Year 12, but these skills are generally sound in Year 13 in both languages.

147. Progress in Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory. Pupils enter the school with limited experience of a foreign languages, and, by the end of the key stage, their level of attainment is still well below national expectations. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Progress in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. Higher attaining pupils benefit from the focus on examination targets. Reading and listening skills are developed to a satisfactory level, but oral confidence remains low, with pronunciation and intonation particularly weak. Lower ability pupils have difficulty expressing themselves orally and in writing, but have sufficient knowledge to convey messages at a basic level. Progress in the sixth form is good. The level of comprehension of the complexities of grammatical structure improves noticeably between Years 12 and 13, and students are able to deal with a range of subject matter. Students following GNVQ courses make good progress towards their targets.

148. The attitudes of pupils and students to their work in modern foreign languages vary widely. Attitudes in Key Stage 3 are poor. Pupils' response to many activities, especially in oral work, is unsatisfactory. Few sustain concentration, and some are passive, failing to become involved with the work. Behaviour in some Key Stage 3 lessons is poor. Nevertheless, some pupils in both key stages are keen to make progress and work well. In the sixth form, attitudes are exemplary. In general, pupils and students are polite. They show some ability to work sensibly in collaborative situations, and many, especially girls, take pride in the presentation and organisation of their work.

149. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 and 4 is unsatisfactory, with major weaknesses in four out of ten lessons. There is some good teaching, especially in the sixth form. Although teachers have good subject knowledge, few are able to teach this effectively across the whole age range. In both key stages, expectations are too low. Teachers too readily diminish the impact of the foreign language by supporting comprehension of the message in English, and by using English instead of the foreign language unnecessarily. Planning for lessons is sound, but does not sufficiently match tasks to the different abilities of pupils within a group. Teaching is too frequently targeted at one level and fails to meet needs of the more able and the least able alike. In most lessons, teachers employ a very limited range of teaching strategies. There is insufficient well-constructed pair or group work and too much whole class work that is teacher-centred. Relationships with pupils are usually satisfactory. However, in some classes in Key Stage 3, teachers lack appropriate strategies for managing challenging behaviour, so that the progress of the whole group is affected. The use of time and resources is good in Key Stage 4. Marking of pupils' work is up to date, but there is a lack of consistency in applying the school's marking policy and also in the level of help provided to pupils through comments on their work. Homework is set as required by the school's homework policy, and complements and sometimes extends the work done in class. Good teaching in the sixth form is characterised by very good knowledge and understanding,

expertly used to promote progress. There is good short and long-term planning, diagnostic marking of work and a clear commitment to the personal and academic development of students.

150. Leadership and management of modern languages is unsatisfactory. There are weaknesses in the key documents for which the head of department is responsible, and they fail to address adequately some of the key issues facing the department in Key Stages 3 and 4. These documents lack strategies to improve the interest of pupils in the subject and to improve the attainment of boys. Schemes of work do not include clear strategies for improving writing and for matching work to the abilities of individual pupils. The overall monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning within the department lacks rigour, and the marking policy is weak. The current staffing situation is unsatisfactory. There is not always a sufficient number of specialist teachers for the number of classes within a year group, so that teachers are teaching a language for which they are not qualified. Opportunities for professional development are good. Since the last inspection, procedures for assessment have improved, but teachers' use of the foreign language and pupils' attitudes have become weaknesses. This represents unsatisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

150. Music

151. Pupils enter the school with little knowledge, few skills and limited experience in music. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils have developed a reasonable musical vocabulary, which they use to describe what they hear when listening, though this is the weakest of the aspects. The cohort who took A Level this summer received reasonable grades, but numbers are too small to allow a reliable comparison to be made with previous years. Currently there is no music taught in Key Stage 4 or the sixth form.

152. In Key Stage 3, pupils can recognise mood, tempo, dynamics and instrumentation. There is only a very small number of able instrumentalists in this key stage, though there has been a recent increase to more than twenty in the numbers of those taking instrumental or vocal lessons in school. Most of these, however, are still at a very elementary stage, and the effects of the instrumental lessons will not be seen for some time. In class, some pupils play melodies with harmony accurately and fluently on keyboards, using both hands, while others play either the melody or harmony as a duet. All pupils use traditional scores, sometimes needing the help of letter names. Composition is usually improvised, often of a good standard. There are no significant variations in attainment. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to that of their peers. There are few pupils with exceptional talent, but they are given stimulating extension work to challenge them. By the end of the Key Stage 3, most pupils will be in line with national expectations, with a significant minority still working towards this. Pupils of all abilities make good progress through the key stage in relation to their prior attainment. Individual targets are set and closely monitored.

153. Pupils are well motivated and demonstrate high levels of concentration when working individually and in groups. They enjoy music lessons and work hard. Relationships with staff and peers are very good, and respect is shown for resources and the feeling and efforts of others. Group work develops team skills. Composition shows creativity and initiative, and many pupils accept responsibility for their own standards and progress, both individually and

as a group. Many show confidence, and will sing or play solos.

154. Teaching is good overall, with instances of very good practice in four out of seven lessons in Key Stage 3. Teachers have good knowledge, skills and understanding of the subject. Schemes, lesson plans, methodologies and delivery show an understanding of how pupils learn. Delivery is confident, control is easily maintained and infectious enthusiasm and energy motivate pupils highly. Pace is often excellent, time is used very well and the amount of work covered effectively in a lesson is impressive. Praise is used well for both effort and achievement. Some imaginative work is limited by lack of appropriate resources. Assessment is satisfactory. Results are used well to inform teaching. The provision for information and communication technology is insufficient for use in Key Stage 3. It is expected that music in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form will soon be reinstated.

155. Opening the department for pupils at break and lunchtimes has had a significantly positive effect on progress this term. A choir and instrumental ensemble have been started in lower school, with plans for concerts shortly and for a stage production early in the next academic year.

155. Physical education

156. The attainment on entry of the majority of pupils is below expectations in relation to their age. As a result of very good quality teaching, they make very good progress so that, by the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of the majority of pupils meets national expectations in the games and activities taught. All pupils have a secure knowledge and understanding of the need for appropriate warm-up before physical exercise, and many are able to name both individual as well as groups of muscles being stretched. By the end of Key Stage 4, the attainment of the great majority of pupils meets national expectations. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*- C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was above the national average. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls in either key stage.

157. In A Level sport studies in 1999, the proportion of students achieving higher grades was not significantly different from national norms. Students make very good progress in lessons in the sixth form. Most students have good knowledge and understanding of, for example, reaction and response time and the importance of specificity in training programmes, both in theory and practice. Since 1997, the proportion of students achieving A or B grades has been improving. In 1999 a very high proportion of students passed the Community Sports Leaders Award course and the Hanson Sports Leaders Award course. Students make very good progress in lessons, particularly in their understanding of the principles and procedures for coaching younger pupils.

158. Across Key Stage 4, pupils make very good progress in core physical education lessons as well as in GCSE physical education lessons. Pupils refine and develop their individual and teamwork skills. Progress in other activities is also very good. GCSE pupils develop a good knowledge and understanding of, for example, human anatomy and of the place of sport in contemporary society. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and make progress in line with that of other pupils.

159. Pupils' and students' attitudes to learning are very good. They are very well motivated

and have very positive attitudes to the subject, both in their lessons and in extra-curricular activities. Pupils respond particularly well to teachers' consistent and very high expectations of good discipline, behaviour and commitment to practising and refining skills. Pupils show respect for the capabilities and efforts of one another, when they are given responsibility for leading aspects of warm-up or coaching and evaluating one another. They handle equipment safely and responsibly in relation to their own safety and that of others. Participation rates in lessons are high. Pupils and students show clear respect for the ethos within which the subject is taught.

160. The quality of teaching is very good overall, with outstanding features in one in five lessons. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject. Lessons are very well structured and planned for the range of pupils' abilities. Explanations and instructions are very good. They ensure that pupils and students are fully aware of what is expected of them and what they have to do to make progress. Teachers use appropriate terminology. Through effective questioning, they encourage pupils' speaking and listening skills, and identify the extent of pupils' and students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers motivate pupils highly, and raise their confidence when faced with additional challenge and progression. Observational assessment and good quality feedback by teachers ensures pupils and students make progress and understand further what is required of them to make further progress. Summative sessions at the end of lessons are used effectively. Appropriate homework is set and marked for the GCSE and GCE Advanced Level courses, as is preparation work for those students following the CSLA and HSLA courses.

161. The breadth of curricular provision in the sixth form is excellent. Extra-curricular sporting provision is excellent, and enhances the learning experiences of many pupils and students. As a result, some pupils have had success at county and regional level in athletics and hockey. School teams have had success at local, regional and national levels in a wide range of sports and activities.

162. The excellent quality of leadership and management of the physical education and sport faculty has a very positive effect on standards of attainment and progress, as well as on the overall quality of physical education provision throughout the school. This is reflected in the announcement made during the inspection of the school's designation as a Sports College. Since the last inspection, the provision for physical education has improved. For example, the overall quality of teaching was good and is now very good and standards of attainment have improved.

Sixth Form Centre

163. The sixth form is a very strong feature of the school, and has a deservedly high reputation for the quality of provision and the success of its students. The large sixth form centre attracts students from many schools in the area. The separate building houses a wide range of courses and is full to capacity, with students on a waiting list at the start of the current school year. Students are able to study GCE A Levels, GCSE courses and GNVQ programmes at Intermediate and Advanced Level in Leisure and Tourism and in Business. Plans are in place to re-introduce Health and Social Care programmes in September 2000. Other planning requirements for the new Post 16 curriculum are well managed. The GCE A Level programme is broad and covers most areas of academic study. However, staffing difficulties

have led to some subjects, including music and religious studies, not being provided at A Level in the current year. A few GNVQ Advanced students also follow an A Level course, although most successfully complete additional units mainly to support progression to higher education.

164. GCSE provision is offered partly as an enrichment programme, including Astronomy, Psychology and Politics, and also to enable students to improve their grades in core subjects. The declared intention of the school to remove most of the GCSE provision runs counter to the emphasis on broadening Post 16 study, despite the school's proposals for new Advanced Subsidiary qualifications. There is no Foundation level provision for vocational study, and current low student numbers on Intermediate level courses raise concerns about their future viability. Any reduction in this provision would adversely narrow the range of options available to students wishing to study at the Centre, particularly given the development of a work-related curriculum in Key Stage 4.

165. A key skills support programme is offered for all students, as are GNVQ Language Units and Sports Leadership Award programmes. The curriculum is enriched through a complementary studies programme for all sixth form students. This includes support for entry to A Level General Studies, work experience, Young Enterprise, and extra-curricular provision. An excellent range of business and community projects is incorporated into the menu of activities, including students working in local schools, involvement in reading partnerships with pupils in the main school, and helping organise the Great North Run. Students at the centre regularly win awards and prizes that recognise the quality of their innovation and hard work. This has recently included an award in a business plan competition and in an investment challenge competition.

166. Most students achieve highly in the sixth form, whether they are studying A Levels or following a GNVQ course. Results over the last three years are well above the national average. Course completion rates are high, although a significant number of students leave their course before completion for employment or alternative education and training, especially from GNVQ programmes. Most students make good progress through their Post 16 programme and this contributes to a good level of value added from students' attainment at age 16. In terms of relative subject performance at A Level, attainment over recent years is as expected for most subjects with the exception of theatre studies, French, and German.

167. Student attitudes and motivation are strong features. They work very well together, and demonstrate a very high level of commitment to homework, personal study and research. Their demeanour and general good humour make a strong contribution to the very good ethos for learning. The quality of presentation of practical and theoretical work is high.

168. The quality of teaching is very good. There is a strong emphasis on providing all students with the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to succeed in the A level examinations and build portfolios of evidence that can gain merit or distinction in GNVQs. The GNVQ assessment process is generally well managed, although the action-planning element is a weakness in several portfolios. Monitoring of progress, including target setting and regular review, is a strong feature, which effectively contributes to maintaining student motivation. A good careers education and guidance programme ensures students maximise

the opportunities for progression to employment or higher education, to which over three-quarters of students progress. The link with a local university in supporting an additional GNVQ unit in Self Development for Career Planning is particularly effective in helping students who might not otherwise have progressed to higher education.

169. The leadership and management of the sixth form centre is effective. This is achieved through shared responsibility involving a deputy head, five senior tutors, the heads of faculty, and other staff with designated responsibility, for example for the complementary studies course and the key skills programme. Considerable time and effort is put into informing the community about opportunities at the centre through literature, interviews for any potential student and their parents, and visits to local schools.

170. In the last inspection, an issue was raised about schemes of work for vocational courses. A scheme is now in place for each course, although most of the planning derives appropriately from the awarding body specifications for each unit and element.

170.

170. PART C: INSPECTION DATA

170. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

171. The inspection team consisted of fourteen inspectors who were in school over a period of five days, an equivalent of 52 inspector days. A total of 190 lessons or parts of lessons was observed for 152 hours, covering all classes and teachers. Samples of work, records and the reports of 160 pupils and students from Year 7 to Year 13, together with the work of six pupils with statements of special educational need, were examined in detail. Planned discussions were held with the headteacher, many members of the teaching staff, the chair of governors and chair of the finance sub-committee. Planned discussions were held with pupils from all phases about their work in the school, and a number of pupils from across the year groups were heard reading. Observations were also made of registration sessions, assemblies and extra-curricular activities. Two of the school's feeder primary schools were visited.

172. Fourteen parents attended the meeting for parents, arranged before the inspection to discuss the life and work of the school. The responses from 113 questionnaires returned from the parental survey were analysed. Further evidence was obtained from a variety of documentation provided by the school before and during the inspection.

173. DATA AND INDICATORS

173. Pupil data

	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 - Y11	Main school 317	Main School 23	Main School 106	Main School 97
Y12 - Y13	6 th Form Centre 629			

173. Teachers and classes

173. Qualified teachers (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	63.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	14.8

173. Education support staff (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of education support staff:	7
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	252

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	76.2
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Average teaching group size:	KS3 15
	KS4 17.5

173. **Financial data**

Financial year:	1998/99
	£
Total Income	2630840.00
Total Expenditure	2639159.00
Expenditure per pupil	2734.88
Balance brought forward from previous year	197073.00
Balance carried forward to next year	70461.00

173. PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out: 946
 Number of questionnaires returned: 113

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	20	57	17	5	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	40	50	7	3	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	22	53	20	4	1
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	21	55	19	4	1
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	32	54	12	6	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	36	55	8	1	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	31	60	7	2	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	28	58	8	6	0
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	22	63	10	3	2
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	27	60	10	3	0
My child(ren) like(s) school	43	43	7	3	4