

INSPECTION REPORT

PERSHORE HIGH SCHOOL
PERSHORE

LEA area: Worcestershire

Unique Reference Number: 116943

Inspection Number: 184004

Headteacher: Michael Krier

Reporting inspector: Edward Little
5653

Dates of inspection: 27 September-1 October 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708477

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

© Crown Copyright 1999

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated. Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school.

Under the Education (Schools) Act 1992 and the Education Act 1993, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	12 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Station Road Persnore Worcs WR10 2BX
Telephone number:	01386 552471
Fax number:	01386 555104
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Philip Richardson
Date of previous inspection:	21-25 November 1994

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Edward Little, Rgl		Attainment and progress Teaching Leadership & management Efficiency of the school
Daljit Singh, Lay Inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Attendance Support, guidance and pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community
Andrew Bennett	English	
Anne Bridger	Business Education	
Olivia Denson		Special educational needs Equal opportunities Learning resources
Peter Gilliat	History	The Curriculum
Sylvia Greenland	Geography	Staffing
David Leonard	Science	
David Morris	Art Music	
Roger Moyle	Physical education	Accommodation
Janet Munslow	Religious education	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Malcolm Padmore	Design and technology Information technology	
Hamish Wilkie	Mathematics	Assessment
Martyn Williams	Modern foreign languages	

The inspection contractor was:

Chapel House Inspection Unit Ltd
The Old Chapel House
Pound Hill
Alresford
Hampshire
SO24 9BW

Telephone: 01962 732307

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints which are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Educational standards achieved by pupils at the school

Attainment and progress 6-14
Attitudes, behaviour and personal development 15-23
Attendance 24-26

Quality of education provided

Teaching 27-33
The curriculum and assessment 34-50
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development 51-55
Support, guidance and pupils' welfare 56-62
Partnership with parents and the community 63-71

The management and efficiency of the school

Leadership and management 72-78
Staffing, accommodation and learning resources 79-91
The efficiency of the school 92-94

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

English, mathematics and science 95-128

Other subjects or courses 129-213

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

Summary of inspection evidence 214

Data and indicators

MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- It promotes very good attitudes to learning in its students.
- It promotes constructive relationships between students and teachers, improving the ethos of the school and the attainment of students.
- It has a very successful sixth form.
- It provides clear and effective leadership.
- It provides very knowledgeable teaching.
- It ensures good behaviour through very good management of students in lessons.
- It makes very good provision for students' moral and social development.
- It provides high quality information for parents.
- It enriches the curriculum through links with the community and extra-curricular activities.
- It makes very good use of its resources.
- It has a very good partnership with parents.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. There are insufficient opportunities for spiritual development.
- II. There are insufficient opportunities for students to apply skills in information and communication technology in many subjects.
- III. Basic number skills in many subjects at KS3 are unsatisfactory.
- IV. Expectations of students with special educational needs at KS3 are not high enough in some subjects.

The school has many more strengths than weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

- V. Attendance has markedly improved, and procedures for recording it are better.
- VI. Assessment and its use to improve teaching and learning.
- VII. There is better provision for students with SEN.
- VIII. The evaluation and review of teaching by senior managers has been developed more effectively.
- IX. The standard of teaching has improved.
- X. The development plan is a better tool for improving the standards and quality of education.

Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds in national tests in 1999, GCSE in 1999 and A/AS-level examinations in 1998:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools*	Key	
Key Stage 3	B	A	<i>well above average</i>	A
GCSE examinations	B	B	<i>above average</i>	B
			<i>average</i>	C
			<i>below average</i>	D

A/AS levels	A	n/a	well below average	E
-------------	---	-----	--------------------	---

*Similar schools are other comprehensive schools where 9-13% of students are eligible for free school meals.

In the 1999 KS3 tests in English, mathematics and science, performance was above the national average, and well above average in comparison with similar schools. This was an overall improvement from the previous year.

In the 1998 GCSE examinations, performance was in line with the national average, having declined from a high point in 1994, and about in line with those for similar schools. Best performances were in art, design and technology, English, geography, mathematics and science. The smaller numbers taking music, PE and RE also did well. In 1999 the GCSE results sharply improved, and were above the national average and above average in comparison with similar schools.

Performance in A level and GNVQ subjects in 1998 was well above the national average and improved in 1999. The standard in the sixth form is a strength of the school. In 1998, 70% of students leaving the upper sixth continued into higher education.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 8-9	Good	Art, design and technology, English, geography, history, information technology, mathematics, modern languages, music, PE and RE.	Science
Years 10-11	Good	Art, business education, design and technology, English, geography, history, information technology, mathematics, modern languages, music, PE and RE.	Science
Sixth form	Very good	English, geography and mathematics.	Design and technology and music.
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

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

Teaching is good overall. In 21% of lessons it was very good or excellent, and in only 4% was it unsatisfactory. Strengths of teaching are in the specialist knowledge and understanding of teachers, in the management of lessons and the expectations of students, particularly in the sixth form. Most lessons are stimulating and interesting, promoting a good response from students.

Teaching could be improved in some science lessons by relating knowledge to students' everyday experiences, and in science, history and modern languages by taking more care to differentiate work for different students.

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Good, both in and out of lessons.

Attendance	Consistently good.
Ethos*	The school provides a very good atmosphere in which learning is encouraged and attainment in all aspects of life is valued.
Leadership and management	Very good, supportive of staff, and contributes to higher standards.
Curriculum	An appropriate curriculum for all, and with strength in extra-curricular activities
Pupils with special educational needs	Students with SEN are well supported. They make good progress but should achieve higher levels at KS3.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Moral and social development are very good, and there are many opportunities for cultural development. However the understanding of a modern multicultural society is less evident, and provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	The use of staff is good as is the provision for staff development. The buildings are used well and cared for, although only just meeting the needs of the curriculum. Resources are satisfactory, although the availability of computers is restricted.
Value for money	Very good.

* *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	What some parents are not happy about
XI. High expectations of students XII. The aims and objectives of the school XIII. Information provided by the school XIV. The help and guidance for students XV. Homework and its use XVI. Induction of Y8 students XVII. The encouragement of good behaviour XVIII. Good leadership and quality of staff XIX. Quality and range of extra-curricular activities	XX. Lack of individual textbooks

Inspectors confirmed the positive view of the school held by parents. Management is open and consultative. Parents feel that their views are respected and that their concerns, when they occur, are appropriately dealt with. The school provides excellent information for parents, both about the school and its activities and the performance of their children. The concern of some parents about the amount of resources available is confirmed.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

The school has high standards in many aspects but in order to improve the standards and the quality of education provided, the school should, through its action plan:

XXI. develop a strategy for improving numeracy at KS3 through a policy for all subjects;
(See paragraphs 12, 124)

XXII. increase the opportunities for students to use ICT to help their learning;
(See paragraphs 13, 103, 110, 174, 180)

XXIII. increase expectations of students with SEN during KS3 through the greater differentiation of work in subjects;
(See paragraphs 14, 29)

XXIV. review and improve the provision made for spiritual development in collective worship and RE.
(See paragraphs 52, 213)

In addition the school should consider how to:

XXV. meet adequately the statutory requirement for collective worship, and
(See paragraph 78)

XXVI. remedy the small amount of science teaching that is unsatisfactory.
(See paragraphs 126)

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. Pershore High School is a mixed comprehensive high school with 1012 students aged 12 to 18, 201 of whom are in the sixth form. Students come from the small town of Pershore and its surrounding countryside. Six students are from ethnic minority households and only one from a home where English is not the first language. The school is well below national averages in these respects. In 1998, 16.2% of students were on the school's register of special educational needs, a rise from 11.7% in 1997. The proportion of students with statements of SEN has also risen from 0.2% in 1994 to 1.3% in 1998. This percentage is now about half the national average. Students who are claiming free school meals formed 3.2% of the population in 1998, although this has fluctuated since 1994 and was 6.0% in 1997. The use of this measure to compare Pershore with other secondary schools is thought by the LEA and the school to be unreliable. This is because of the unwillingness of families in this part of Worcestershire to declare their children in this way partly because Worcestershire has not maintained a school meal service for several years. The school has carried out a survey indicating that 12% of its students are eligible, and other evidence from the LEA supports this. The inspection team has taken this into account and has used this better estimate in making comparisons using benchmark figures based on percentage of students eligible for free school meals.

2. Other indicators show that the school takes in students with a full range of attainment and a significant proportion of students of above average attainment. They also come from homes in a wide range of socio-economic circumstances.

3. The school's main aim is "to encourage students to discover and to make use of their talents so that they may achieve academic success, develop self-esteem and a clear sense of purpose, and prepare for life in a rapidly changing society". A secondary, but related aim is "to continue to improve the provision we make for students specifically to enhance their learning and achievement".

4. The school has recently gained International School accreditation, in recognition of

its extensive involvement in overseas projects, notably the Comenius Project in partnership with schools in Europe. It acquired the Investors' in People Award in 1997 and a Sportsmark in 1998.

5. Its main targets from its development plan for 1999/2000 are to:

xxvii.strive for consistency in the application of policies and procedures which impact on students' learning;

xxviii.encourage students to learn more effectively and improve their performance through more reflective teaching and learning;

xxix.encourage heads of departments in their role especially with regard to monitoring and evaluation;

xxx.submit an application for Technology College status;

xxxi.prepare for curriculum changes due in September 2000;

xxxii.review management, organisational, resource and accommodation issues associated with significant growth in student numbers.

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
1998	89	84	173

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	50	65	56
	Girls	69	60	54
	Total	119	125	110
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	67(64)	71(72)	62(73)
	National	65(57)	60(60)	56(60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	36(29)	48(46)	36(40)
	National	35(23)	36(37)	27(29)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	53	66	70
	Girls	71	63	67
	Total	124	129	137
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	71(73)	74(66)	78(77)
	National	62(60)	64(64)	62(61)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	46(44)	45(32)	46(44)
	National	31(28)	37(37)	31(29)

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	85	91	176

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	34	81	83
	Girls	54	88	90
	Total	88	169	173
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	50(40.4)	96(82.5)	98(98.2)
	National	44.6(43.1)	89.8(88.4)	95.2(94.1)

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

	Number	% Success rate
School	0	n/a
National		n/a

Attainment in the Sixth Form³

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

Year	Male	Female	Total
1998	36	39	75

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	22	21	21.4(20.19)	4.7	4.3	4.5(none)
National	n/a	n/a	17.6(n/a)	n/a	n/a	2.8(n/a)

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

	Number	% Success rate
School	0	n/a
National		n/a

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

	Number	% Success Rate
School	11	100
National		n/a

Attendance

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

		%
Authorised Absence	School	6.9
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.5
	National comparative data	1.1

²

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

³

Figures in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Exclusions

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

	Number
Fixed period	12
Permanent	1

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:

	%
Very good or better	21
Satisfactory or better	96
Less than satisfactory	4

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

(Note- In references to "similar" schools below, comparisons are made with maintained comprehensive schools in which 9-13% of pupils are eligible for free school meals)

6. At Key Stage 3 in 1998, students' achievements in the National Curriculum tests in the three core subjects were above the national average, but they were below average when compared with similar schools. Attainment in the mathematics tests is better than that in English and science and more students achieve level 6 or higher than in similar schools. Results in 1999 are better overall, but there is a big difference between the attainment in English, where it is just below that in the previous two years and science and in mathematics. Performance in the core subjects since 1996 is well above the national average. Science Key stage 3 results for 1999 are well above those for 1998 and mathematics shows an increase, albeit smaller. In 1999 the results are well above average in comparison with similar schools.

7. In 1998 the GCSE and GNVQ examination results, where 50% of candidates gained A*-C grades, were broadly in line with the national average but were well below in comparison with similar schools. The 1998 results are at the end of a decline in GCSE results from a high point in 1994 and results for 1999 are considerably increased at 57.8%. The 1999 results are above the national average and above those of similar schools and they are a welcome improvement in the trend in results for the school. This improvement has largely been brought about by increased attainment by boys, 54.6% of whom gained five A*-C grades in 1999 compared with 40% in 1998. Girls' attainment rose from 59.3% in 1998 to 60.2% in 1999. Although there is still a significant difference between the achievements of boys and girls, the gap is narrowing. It is to the school's credit that this has been brought about through increased attainment by boys whilst maintaining attainment by girls.

8. In 1998, students' results in the GCE A and AS level examinations were well above the national average. During 1995 to 1998, the number of entries for 2 or more A level subjects rose sharply, and on the basis of the average for the last three years, the A level points score was well above the national average. In 1999 the average point score has risen again. As in GCSE, girls perform better than boys in A level subjects overall.

9. Students in Y9 have only had one year in the school of the time of inspection. Based on work in lessons, attainment in subjects at this point in the key stage is average overall, but above average in geography, history, music and PE. Students in Y11 are also only halfway through their courses, but attainment is above average in art, business education, design and technology, English, geography, history, music and PE. In the sixth form, attainment is well above average in science and above average in art, business education, English, geography, history, maths, PE and RE.

10. Students make considerable progress from Y8 to Y11, but there is a little evidence in science that work in Y8 is more like that expected in Y7. There is, however, no clear evidence overall that the transfer from middle schools after Y7 interrupts or slows students' progress through a lack of continuity or repetition of work. The school maintains effective links with middle schools to prevent this happening. What is clear is that students make good progress in nearly all subjects after joining the school.

11. Students' literacy skills are well developed in subjects other than English. For example, science study guides include original articles and papers for students to read, and work in mathematics at KS4 provides opportunities for sustained investigative writing. A literacy steering group has recently been established, and the school is to devote resources to further improving literacy skills across the curriculum.

12. Students' standards of numeracy are only good for the highest attaining students on entry to the school. The remaining students do not fully know their multiplication tables and number bonds on joining Y8. These standards hinder progress in all attainment targets in the subject for these students.

13. Students have satisfactory basic ICT skills. They are strongest in the use of word processors and spreadsheets. A number of students make good use of the Internet and support their research in several subjects. Skills are weaker in control technology and using the computer to collect measurements. Students have a good grasp of the impact of information and communication technology on society.

14. At KS3 the attainment of most students with SEN is below expectations, but in some science, design and technology, history, mathematics, modern language and geography lessons students reach appropriate levels. Attainment of students at KS4 is below average and most students with special needs are in lower ability sets. There are no identified students with special needs in the sixth form. The progress of students at both key stages is satisfactory or better. Students at Stage 1 of the Code of Practice are making progress in lessons whilst those at Stages 2-5 are making progress towards the targets in their IEPs where work is appropriately differentiated and classroom support assistants are involved in planning. There are 18 students with statements, all of whom are integrated into mainstream classes with widely varying levels of support. At KS4 all students are working towards accreditation at GCSE, and staff provide mentoring for some students to help keep them on course. Last year, all students left the school with some qualifications.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

15. Students' attitudes, and the relationships between students and with teachers are very good and are a significant strength of the school. The consistently good behaviour of the majority of students, as well as these relationships, provide a good basis for personal development.

16. Students' attitudes to learning in most lessons and during both key stages, including those in the sixth form, are very effective. Levels of concentration are appropriate and sustained by the great majority of students. Students enjoy learning and join in discussions enthusiastically, enabling them to exchange ideas and information effectively. When opportunities are provided for working on their own students make effective use of their initiative.

17. Group work is part of many lessons. Discussion groups are used to help students to develop their own thinking and approach problems constructively in, for example technology lessons. At the same time they successfully develop their verbal skills. Boys and girls, as well as students of different race, form mixed friendship groups. Students have respect and tolerance for others. Many students are willing to share information about themselves and their school, often speaking positively about staff. They are polite and courteous to both staff and visitors.

18. Behaviour of students is good, both inside and outside the classroom. Most

students move around the school in an appropriate manner, despite some uncomfortable congestion in the corridors. Students respect the school's code of conduct and observe its anti-bullying policy. A few students expressed concern about bullying, but most are happy that reported incidents are dealt with satisfactorily. Students particularly value the support of older students. Parents may be involved and students have access to trained counsellors from the Youth Enquiry Service who visit the school once a week.

19. There are good opportunities for students' personal development. Work placements, the school library and the student mentoring project provide extensive opportunities for students to exercise their responsibilities, develop their social skills and serve the school and community constructively. Students and senior managers work closely together on the school council in a particularly constructive and forward looking way.

20. Since the last inspection students' attitudes to learning have improved. Relationships between students and teachers have also developed with increased respect and tolerance.

21. Students with special needs are well motivated and benefit from in-class support. They respond better when the tasks are challenging and expectations are high. They make good progress towards the behaviour targets set. Teachers have high expectations of good behaviour and are consistent in their demands. Liaison between the SENCO and departments is a significant feature of the curriculum support policy and is one of the means by which students on the SEN register are monitored.

22. The curriculum support department offers workshops for small numbers of students who experience behavioural, organisational or basic skill difficulties. Students attend with their parent's agreement and are withdrawn from the normal timetable for one lesson. The focus of these workshops is to encourage social development and personal organisation as well as developing basic skills. Most students are positive about the support they receive and this is evident in their willingness to attend workshops and in their relationships with the staff in the curriculum support department, including the classroom support assistants. There is no difference between the attitudes of boys and girls, although there are more boys than girls on the SEN register.

23. The school has a general policy of promoting equality of opportunity and some departments have an equal opportunities statement in the departmental handbook. The policy extends to the selection and recruitment of staff who are seen as important role models. Staff training on boys' underachievement was successful in raising issues which departmental heads used to encourage changes in classroom organisation and seating arrangements.

Attendance

24. The school has made very good progress in increasing attendance since the last inspection, due significantly to the diligence and commitment of staff at all levels. Attendance is now consistently good and above the national average. Unauthorised absence is below the national average for similar schools. Students are generally punctual.

25. Staff ensure that good and improved attendance is rewarded and pursue student absences rigorously, thereby gaining the confidence of parents and students. They monitor student absences effectively. The school complies with the statutory requirements for the administration of registers.

26. The relationship between the school and the Education Welfare Service has improved, which enables the school to pursue all truancy consistently. After a few lessons, however, checks on absent students are not followed through consistently. The good attendance, on the other hand, enables students to make good progress.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

27. Teaching is good overall. In just over one-fifth (21%) of lessons teaching was very good or excellent, and in fewer than 1 in 20 lessons (4%) it was less than satisfactory. This is a good improvement from the situation described in the previous report.

28. Teachers' specialist knowledge of their subjects is very good, and they use it well to make lessons stimulating and interesting. In a few science lessons at KS3 and KS4 however, teachers did not link their knowledge sufficiently well to the students' own experience. Expectations are high and notably so in sixth form science. Although high, expectations are realistic, and in geography students are expected to think through their answers to questions in some depth. Teachers expect much from students in games, gymnastics and health related fitness in PE, but in a significant number of science lessons at KS3 and KS4 demand is not high enough. There is insufficient challenge for discussion, reflection and empathy in RE.

29. Lessons are usually planned appropriately, but in some subjects, such as history, modern languages and science, too little care is taken to differentiate work for students of different attainment. Different methods of organising classes are used well, so that, for example, students undertake detailed individual observation and recording using a microscope in science to good effect. Business education makes good use of group games, activities and exercises sometimes involving the use of ICT. Standards of discipline are high and students are very well behaved. The use of good humour, enthusiasm and stimulating teaching activities maintains these standards. Good relationships are maintained with some potentially difficult students in RE. Good use is made of resources, particularly time, and where subjects make use of ICT it is an effective extension of the work. Entertaining and appropriate use of authentic materials, such as children's books, is made in modern languages. In a few lessons of RE there is a heavy reliance on the use of printed notes, which dampens students' enthusiasm. In a few lessons, science investigations by individuals or small groups rather than demonstrations by the teacher would have been more effective in improving science skills.

30. Assessment is usually helpful, there are good examples of marking, and comments designed to help students improve. Oral comments in English and history are used particularly effectively. Homework is set regularly and is complementary to class work with which in all subjects it is closely integrated. Parents are very satisfied with the homework set for their children and inspection supported their view.

31. Students with special needs make good progress where teaching is imaginative and a variety of strategies are used in lessons. IEPs are available to all teachers and they are monitored twice a term. Some students have subject specific targets in English, mathematics, geography and science and advice is available to teachers from the SENCO. The SENCO regularly attends departmental meetings to discuss the needs of particular students and to hear concerns from teachers. There is useful differentiation of worksheets in English, mathematics, business education and PE and in science at KS3, although in a few subjects at KS3, materials are not differentiated sufficiently and students with SEN may

be unable, or take longer, to complete the tasks. Students with statements are well supported by Curriculum Support Assistants (CSAs), particularly at KS4. Support for students at all stages is very positive and many students benefit from the presence of another adult (or adults) in the classroom. In some subjects, however, such as science and modern languages the CSAs are not sufficiently confident in their knowledge of the subject and need more preparation in order to help students.

32. The curriculum is equally open to all students and teachers' schemes of work identify topics in which equal opportunities should be considered. In history, geography English, PE, RE and business education subject materials are well chosen, teaching styles are adjusted and classroom approaches are varied in order to minimise any disadvantage on grounds of ability, gender or race.

33. The school has recently produced a detailed teaching and learning policy. Whilst not all subject departments have taken it to heart and implemented its recommendations, the policy has taken some time to produce and has built on good practice already in the school. It is helping to bring about good standards of teaching in the school, not least to alert teachers to differences of attainment of boys and girls and the strategies needed to improve both.

The curriculum and assessment

34. At KS3 the school is providing a broad and balanced curriculum which includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum, and RE. The curriculum is enhanced through the provision of drama and a second foreign language that is introduced in Y9.

35. At KS4 the school makes good provision for the curriculum, which fully meets statutory requirements. All students undertake GCSE courses in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, and a modern foreign language. Since 1997 all students have followed a GCSE short course in RE and some do the full course through a programme of lessons at lunchtime. Students have an opportunity to choose two further GCSE courses, one of which must be history, geography or drama. The school has worked hard to encourage pre-vocational courses and has now developed an Access Course which includes participation in the Youth Award Scheme. The school offers a tenth GCSE subject in out-of-school time and currently an art and design course is provided in this way in Y10.

36. In the sixth form the school offers a good choice of courses, including 20 A level subjects and GNVQ programmes in business, and in health and social care. Students follow a variety of general studies courses and a wide-ranging tutorial programme, and are also prepared for the A level General Studies examination; some students, however, are unable to attend general studies lessons due to their other examination commitments. Games and recreational activities are timetabled on one afternoon. Although an RE course is included in the general studies programme, the school's provision does not meet statutory requirements.

37. The overall quality of curriculum planning by departments is good, except that the scheme of work in science is under-developed and the lack of an overall scheme of work in English means that some students repeat work. The school works hard to maintain close links with its partner middle schools, and effective liaison arrangements help to ensure good continuity and progression for students. Good links with higher and further education institutions also help to promote a smooth transition from school to college or university.

38. The school's flexible arrangements for grouping students work well, and help students make good progress. However, the work in some subjects at Key Stages 3 and 4 does not always take sufficient account of different levels of attainment within a class, and this limits some students' opportunities to make progress.

39. The curriculum is extended with a weekly tutorial lesson for all students including the sixth form. The programme is carefully coordinated, well planned and includes sex and drugs education and talks by visiting speakers. The school makes good provision for careers education and guidance. Relevant topics are covered in the tutorial programme and all students undertake one week's work experience in Y10. The school has good careers libraries for the main school and sixth form, and students have easy access to careers guidance through the school's careers officer.

40. A good programme of extra-curricular activities enhances the curriculum. Strengths in sports and the performing arts ensure that students have very good opportunities in these areas. The school has an active debating society and in recent years has achieved considerable success in national debating and public speaking competitions. Students also have the opportunity to take part in educational visits, both in this country and abroad; for example, a well-established sixth form work experience exchange takes place each year with a Luxembourg Lycee. Since 1998 the school has been involved in a Comenius project, which is promoting curriculum links with four schools in Germany, Hungary and Sweden.

41. Since the last inspection the school has continued to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all students. At KS4 provision for RE has improved and the new Access Course has been developed, and in the sixth form the range of courses has increased.

42. All students with SEN study the full National Curriculum and no students are disapplied. Arrangements are made for a student with severe physical difficulties to travel to a nearby special school for PE. Students are placed in mainstream classes for all subjects and follow the same curriculum as all the other students. All curriculum support is based around the development of appropriate skills to allow students to study all subjects.

43. The school has made significant improvements to its assessment system since the previous inspection. Students are now formally assessed in all subjects three times a year in progress reviews. In these students are encouraged to set targets for improvement. The process has not started yet this year since it is early in the autumn term, but last years' planners show the positive impact of this development. The record of achievement at the end of the year summarises the picture developed in the reviews and includes student comment. The reviews include an assessment of attainment against personal potential and also against the year group on a 1 to 5 scale. Additionally students' commitment is also graded. These assessments help the school develop targets for individual students. This process will be helped by the first analysis of its entry into Y8 by assessments made using the middle years information system (MidYIS). The data will be incorporated with other information to improve the estimation of value added and allow for more effective targeting of individual students.

44. Students believe that target setting helps them and it has contributed to the improvement in the 1999 examination results. The school has also developed a successful mentoring process for students approaching Y11 who need support. Staff and industrial mentors provide this effectively.

45. Assessment in individual subjects is the responsibility of heads of department, three of whom have been in the school for three weeks only. Their work is monitored effectively

by the senior management team, which is a major improvement on the previous inspection. However, there are still considerable variations in the assessment procedures within subjects.

46. Monitoring of marking is also the responsibility of heads of department, whose work is overseen by the senior management team. Marking has improved since the previous inspection and is generally effective in all subjects.

47. Assessment is used well in both day-to-day and in middle-term planning of future learning in mathematics, physical education, history and modern foreign languages, and satisfactorily in English, science and religious education.

48. Overall the school has improved assessment through more positive monitoring. Students are set realistic targets and the school is well placed to make further progress

49. The assessment of the needs of students with SEN and the monitoring of their progress is a strength of the curriculum support department. There is regular liaison between the SENCO, CSAs and the heads of department and students' IEPs are reviewed twice a term. Individual targets are monitored and amended as necessary.

50. All students are encouraged to participate equally in all curricular and extra-curricular activities. Students with special needs are well integrated into mainstream lessons and girls and boys have a balanced choice of options at KS4. There is gender imbalance in the take up of subjects. In A level economics and business studies and in English at KS4 the upper sets do contain more girls than boys but they are set on the basis of prior attainment. Single gender groups, as a way of improving boys' and girls' attainment, have been considered but rejected. In the sixth form those students taking A levels do not follow the general studies programme so there is, therefore, no statutory RE component for them.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

51. The school has recently developed a policy for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students to ensure that contributions are made from appropriate areas of the curriculum and the general life of the school. Although it is not yet fully implemented, the school's provision for these aspects of the development of its students is good overall.

52. Provision for the spiritual development of the students is, however, unsatisfactory. Aspects of the teaching of religious education increase awareness of the spiritual dimension of belief and some stimuli for personal reflection are found in English, music and art. Opportunities are missed in most subjects and in many assemblies. However, a few assemblies observed did involve opportunities for reflection and for students to take part. The students attend five assemblies each fortnight. Consequently statutory requirements for a daily collective act of worship are not met, although the quality of assemblies has improved since the last inspection.

53. The development of the students' understanding of moral values is very good. The whole school ethos, endorsed by the code of conduct, promotes mutual respect. There are numerous planned opportunities for students to consider moral and ethical issues and to distinguish right from wrong. In religious education Y11 students give serious consideration to the fundamental concept of morality itself. In design and technology there is emphasis on care for the environment and in science the ethics of genetic engineering are

considered. The tutorial programme deals with issues such as honesty and citizenship.

54. The opportunities for the social development of students are very good. The teachers provide a lead in their sensitive and considerate approach to students. Aspects of social behaviour are regularly dealt with in the tutorial programme. Students are encouraged to take responsibility and to contribute to the life of the community in many ways. These include library duties, raising funds for charities and sixth form mentoring of those in Y8. The school and year councils provide a genuine forum for students to contribute to the running of their school. Trips and visits, including opportunities for residential experience, develop social skills. The good range of extra-curricular activities makes a positive contribution to the social development of the students.

55. The school's provision for the cultural development of its students is generally good. Visits are arranged to theatres, concerts, art galleries and abroad. The Comenius Project is particularly effective in promoting cultural activities with young people in Germany, Sweden and Hungary. In many areas of the curriculum there are planned opportunities for studying other cultures. For example, in English the students read texts which reflect multicultural diversity. In music and dance they respond to stimuli from other cultures. However, their knowledge and understanding of the rich cultural diversity of their own region are not well developed by the school.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

56. The pastoral provision in the school is good. The tutorial team, led by the senior managers, is sensitive to communal and individual needs and provides a sympathetic and committed service for all. Information about students' progress and personal development is shared between departments and is used constructively. As a result there are effective systems in place to monitor, sustain and develop the individual academic progress and personal development of all students. Teachers and form tutors report students' progress and levels of attainment effectively to all parents.

57. Registrations, assemblies and the school award schemes are used well to raise students' self-esteem, confidence and celebrate their achievements.

58. The senior student mentoring system contributes effectively to the well-being of younger students in the school. The LEA's mobile counselling service offers confidential support, guidance and information to students and enables them to share their concerns and make informed choices about health, sex and drugs education. These systems are further supported by the school nurse, the pastoral team and the provision outlined in the personal, social, health and education programme.

59. The careers programme is an integral part of the PSE programme and offers satisfactory levels of support and guidance. It enables students to make informed choice about the world of work, training, post-sixteen and higher education.

60. Policies for behaviour and attendance are extremely effective and students are disciplined and happy. They also contribute to improvements in the academic progress of students, including those with SEN.

61. There are effective policies and procedures for child protection administered by two caring and committed designated members of the school staff. They provide good exchanges of information between the school and specialist agencies, and investigate all reported incidents professionally and efficiently. The school has improved its pastoral

provision since the last inspection.

62. The implementation of the health and safety policy helps the school to provide a safe environment and many departments demonstrate good practice. However, during the inspection the building was evacuated and some weaknesses were identified which have implication for the safety and well being of the school community. These were reported to the senior management team so that the policy could be reviewed and improved.

Partnership with parents and the community

63. The school enjoys a very constructive and purposeful relationship with most parents and there is good communication between parents, teachers, governors and the management team. This is a strength of the school.

64. The school provides very good information through both formal and informal channels. The school newsletter is excellent and widely read. It informs parents of important events, changes to policy and procedures and encourages parents to participate in the life of the school and community. The school prospectus, KS4 booklet and the annual report from governors complement the newsletter and celebrate students' many achievements. Both the school prospectus and the annual report from governors conform to statutory requirements. The school makes good use of the student planner, which many parents use effectively to exchange information with the school.

65. All parents are provided with the students' interim and annual reports whereby parents are made aware of their child's progress, levels of attainment and attitude to learning. Students set personal targets which are systematically monitored by form and subject tutors. Opportunities are extended to parents to discuss their child's progress, their concerns and for them to share their child's achievements.

66. The school encourages active participation of parents through the Parents Association, which is run by a small, but committed group of parents. They raise funds that are used to purchase learning materials and equipment. The PA hosts various social events, as well as workshops that provide parents with opportunities to understand the work their children are doing. The school has seen a significant increase in the number of parents who visit the school to support concerts, performances and sports events.

67. The school gains considerable enrichment through links with the local, wider and international community. They are another strength of the school. Many departments, including English, art, music and modern foreign languages gain educational benefits for students through the Comenius Project. The project, involving students in France, Germany and Hungary, provides numerous opportunities for students of the same age to support their learning by acknowledging and celebrating the achievements of their respective countries. Students correspond, thereby improving their social and linguistic skills to good effect. The project provides a framework for spiritual development, as well as opportunities for students to value their British and European heritage.

68. The PE department and the school have been recognised for their work in the community and were recently awarded the Sportsmark Award. The department works closely with the Pershore cricket, basketball and football clubs, which provide coaching to a high standard for students.

69. Students perceive the Y10 work experience as a good source of learning and social development. Students make informed choices and are able to develop their social and

linguistic skills as well as serving the community as responsible citizens.

70. The school has effective links with its contributory middle schools, which provide a solid framework for curriculum development and pastoral support for all students at KS3. The constructive links ensure a smooth transition through the key stage and support students' progression and continuity.

71. Since the last inspection the school has improved its relationship still further with both parents and the community and has continued to extend opportunities for students participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme, Young Enterprise and local and national awards in public speaking and sports.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

72. There is a relatively small senior management team with a wide range of responsibilities. However, these are shared with a broader tier of middle management and this has led to highly purposeful consultation about all the important policies and developments in the school. The head is an extremely efficient and effective leader, and is very well regarded as such by governors, parents and staff. The senior managers and governors work in close co-operation over the developments in the school. Most governors participate in professional staff development days held regularly to enable staff to contribute their ideas on future developments. This close co-operation and consultation mean that all staff and governors share the liberal and liberating aims of the school and help to turn ideals into practice.

73. Since the last inspection senior management has taken to heart the criticism made then that there should be more careful review of the implementation and evaluation of policies. This is now evident in the improvements that have been made in the appraisal of teaching, the observation of lessons and the review all departmental performance carried out by senior managers. Development planning depends on self-evaluation by subject departments, who present their plans to the head. Collectively, these plans are carefully shaped into the school development plan that is then scrutinised by governors. It is a highly effective and economical process, considering the small size of the school management team. The school now has sufficient procedures and has produced an influential policy on teaching and learning that put in a good position to make further improvements.

74. Subject department managers are very effective and there are three new and one acting heads of department in post from the start of this term. There are important developments taking place in most departments, from the production of new and more useful schemes of work to the setting of higher targets and expectations, most notably in science, mathematics and history.

75. There is a curriculum support policy for SEN in which the need for early identification is explicit and which documents the arrangements for support, liaison with other agencies, the entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum and the arrangements for the involvement of parents. There is a nominated governor who works closely with the school. The allocation of funding for special needs is clearly identified in the school's budget. The SENCO regularly attends departmental meetings and there is a nominated SEN link person in each department. There are termly meetings with the educational psychologist and the Learning and Behaviour Support Service. They have all had a good effect on the provision for students with SEN.

76. The school's policies for admissions, discipline and exclusion are unbiased and there is an effective policy for equal opportunities. Students' attainment at KS3, in GCSE and other public exams is monitored and the information is used to consider alternative strategies, such as seating arrangements and single sex groupings, to improve the attainments of boys. The staff development programme raises the awareness of teachers to differences in needs of different students.

77. The school is working on appropriate strategies to improve attainment and these have already produced an effect. It is a civilised place in which students have many opportunities to learn, where they enjoy good support from their teachers and where they are no constraints to the opportunities offered.

78. All statutory requirements are met except that for an act of collective worship held daily for all students, and the provision of RE for all sixth form students.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

79. The match of the number, qualifications and experience of the classroom staff to the demands of the curriculum is good. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, though at present job descriptions are not available. The student-teacher ratio is just above average for similar schools, enabling students to be taught in smaller groups than would otherwise be the case. Well-qualified specialists take almost all lessons. This year there has been a comparatively high number of new appointments to the teaching staff, including five newly qualified teachers. A number of formerly full-time teachers have become part-time for a variety of reasons. These changes have not had a negative effect on the standards of teaching.

80. There is a gender imbalance in the senior management team, though the school has attempted to recruit women at this level. Questions raised in the last inspection about staffing in the special needs department have been dealt with by the appointment of a full-time special needs co-ordinator and a number of classroom support assistants. Their work is becoming well integrated into the whole curriculum, though there is some lack of flexibility in the use of the support assistants in specialist lessons, such as science and languages.

81. The match of the number, qualifications and experience of support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory. There is an adequate number of administrative, site management and mealtime supervisory staff. However, science technicians do not have adequate time to develop their support role.

82. Arrangements for the induction and professional development of all staff are good. There are comprehensive induction procedures for both newly qualified teachers and for all other new staff, with regular meetings and every new member of staff allocated to a mentor. Arrangements are in place for the regular appraisal of all staff. There is a detailed staff development policy and a staff development committee that meets regularly. In-service training, including staff training days in school, is linked to curriculum needs and carefully planned.

83. The school is situated on a very pleasant site. Major enhancements of sixth form accommodation and the library took place in 1997. The school has worked hard to improve accommodation since the last inspection, but with limited finance.

84. Overall, the standard of accommodation is good and meets the needs of subjects.

The school has sufficient general-purpose classrooms, but space is reducing as numbers of students increase. Most subjects benefit from being taught in grouped rooms. In geography, rooms are scattered and this makes it difficult to use bulky resources, sharing of information and monitoring of departmental work. The accommodation for SEN is good, combining teaching rooms and office space where students can readily find SEN staff. In many subjects the provision of specialist facilities is good. The best features include the drama studio, library, curriculum support unit, sports hall, recording studio and sixth form centre. Most laboratories in science need refurbishing as they are not stimulating spaces which encourage an investigative approach to the subject. The entrance to the school is uninviting since the main door is under the fire escape. There is good material on display in corridors and classrooms, mostly of students' work, which encourages students and celebrates their achievements.

85. Buildings are well maintained and free from vandalism and graffiti. Maintenance and improvements are efficiently managed and there is an effective programme for the refurbishment of teaching areas. Cleaning is closely monitored and is generally satisfactory. Litter is not a problem in either the buildings or surrounds. Students move around the school in a very orderly manner and they behave sensibly when coping with unavoidable congestion at peak movement times in areas such as the modern foreign languages ground floor. The system used for individual tutor group movement to and from assembly, is very effective. The school enjoys spacious sports grounds, although drainage can be a problem. The multi-purpose sports hall enables students to experience a wide range of individual and team sports. There is a successful lettings policy and the public use the school's facilities for many activities, including adult education, music and sport.

86. Since the last inspection, access on the ground floor for wheelchairs has been improved. A toilet for the disabled is now available, but there is no lift system to provide access to the first floor. Although the rooms are small in the older building, the school's policy of restricting the carrying of coats and large bags is effective in ensuring sufficient space for teaching. The gymnasium's size presents less problems because of curricular re-planning. In the art block a clearance of all unnecessary items has created two large teaching areas, pottery and sixth form spaces. The sixth form building, originally built for 70-100 students, now caters for 200 through the 1997-98 extension, which doubled common room and study room sizes, provided new areas for careers, increased office space and developed four good sized teaching rooms. The school library was extended at the same time and is now an attractive and effective working area. Displays of students' work and the celebration of students' achievements are now much in evidence and very good in quality.

87. The budget for learning resources is allocated to teaching departments through their development planning process and the total budget share is higher than for schools of a similar size. There is a highly effective rolling programme for the replacement of furniture and the decoration of classrooms, priorities for which are identified from the school development plan and the LEA's five-yearly Conditions Survey.

88. The supply of textbooks is adequate in mathematics, history, geography, and modern languages, especially at KS4 and for the sixth form. In science, RE and English there is a shortage of textbooks for allocation to examination students although appropriate texts are available for lessons in RE. In most subjects use is made of school produced resources, but these are of variable quality and are not always differentiated for students of differing ability.

89. The range of specialist equipment in history, mathematics, modern languages,

music, art, PE and design and technology is good, although that in technology needs bringing up to date. There is a specialist teaching room for PE and good use is made of TV and video equipment. The Curriculum Support department has a wide range of appropriate books, teacher-produced materials and specialist computer software.

90. The library is well stocked with fiction and non-fiction and has Internet access and computer terminals linked to the school's network. Since the last inspection the provision for modern foreign languages has been improved and now includes authentic foreign language materials. There is a shortage of books for business studies and economics and the few books available are out of date. The Curriculum Support department makes good use of the library to encourage reading and to promote individual study.

91. Since the last inspection the school has established an ICT suite that consists of four computer rooms, three of which are networked and are linked to the library and sixth form centre. A full-time IT assistant supports teachers and keeps the system running. There is adequate accommodation for examination classes, business studies and key skills but the facility is so heavily used that it can be difficult for subject teachers to book time in the computer rooms. All departments, except PE, have their own computers. In mathematics and modern languages the programs are suitable, but the computers are becoming obsolete and they will not run on the other machines in the school.

The efficiency of the school

92. Financial planning in the school is very efficient and the budget is initiated by the needs of teaching in departments. Spending is well controlled and departments have good information on which to plan. Although a very small deficit was brought forward to 1999, this represents a tiny financial risk within normal accounting practice. Teachers are deployed effectively and the school makes good use of education support staff. In relation to other schools, expenditure on teachers is quite low and so too are building and maintenance costs. The school spends relatively more on education resources. Whilst these priorities are generally appropriate there is some necessarily ineffective use of teaching and technician time through the dispersal of accommodation in science and geography. Although there is an adequate number of computers for ICT examination courses, departments wishing to use them in their own teaching find that the suites may be already heavily booked.

93. The curriculum support department provides efficient and effective support for students with special needs. Resources are used effectively to support students access to the curriculum and are regularly reviewed. Support staff are allocated according to individual needs and are usually effective except where specialist knowledge is required. The SENCO is aware of this and is involved in planning staff training in order to improve the effectiveness of in-class support.

94. The basic income to the school is low in comparison to other maintained schools with sixth forms. Although there is some additional funding for SEN, which is used well, and for staff development, the school is working on the edge of financial security. Since the attainment of students is above national averages, especially in the sixth form, and the intake is not particularly favoured, the school represents very good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

95. The percentages of students gaining level 5 or above, and level 6 or above, in the 1998 KS3 tests was above the national average, but just below the average for schools of a similar type. Test results in 1999 were similar, but teacher assessments were lower than in previous years. This apparent decline in standards was not borne out by scrutiny of students' work, and may be explained by limited opportunities for staff to standardise judgements at the end of the key stage. The trend since 1996 has been upward and above national average.

96. In GCSE English in 1998, 59% of candidates gained a grade A*-C, about average for similar schools. In GCSE English literature, 50% of students gained grades A*-C, compared with 56% nationally. In 1999, 69% of students achieved grades A*-C in English, and 83% in English literature. All students entered for GCSE English in 1998 and 1999 achieved a grade A*-G. All students entered for English literature in 1998, and 98% of those entered in 1999 achieved a grade A*-G. Boys perform less well than girls in GCSE examinations, reflecting the national difference. Recent in-service training on raising boys' achievement has not yet had an impact on results. In 1999, 54% of candidates achieved grades A*-C in GCSE drama.

97. At A level, 19% of students achieved grades A-B in 1998 compared with 27% nationally in the language and literature course, but in 1999 the comparable school figure was 65%. In literature, 50% of students achieved grades A-B in 1998, compared with 32% nationally.

98. At all key stages and in the sixth form, students have well-developed skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing. They talk confidently, using formal language appropriately. Higher attaining students articulate complex ideas and feelings, for example in responding to issues such as prejudice, or their own experiences. Students listen sympathetically and respectfully to each other. They are aware that writers create effects for different purposes and audiences in fiction and non-fiction. The best written work shows imagination and originality, using sophisticated vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. Note making and drafting is encouraged; students present work attractively and with few technical errors. Much of the best work starts from students reflecting on significant events in their own lives.

99. Progress is good throughout the school. It is evident in how students develop their ability to communicate ideas and feelings and to apply prior knowledge or understanding to new styles of writing or to reading texts by contemporary and historical authors. Good liaison with middle schools ensures that equal progress is made by students of all abilities.

100. The curriculum is enhanced by drama and library periods in Y8. In drama, students use skills such as concentration, cooperation and self-evaluation. At KS4, the drama option provides students with very good opportunities for learning and personal development. Library lessons instil good reading habits and research skills, and support school literacy initiatives. Many students are adventurous in their choices of reading, and the library offers an excellent range of printed fiction, CD ROMs and Internet access.

101. Throughout the school, students' attitudes to their work are good. They listen

carefully to instructions, and concentrate when working individually or in groups. Behaviour in lessons is generally very good; poor behaviour is rare, but occurs when students are not sufficiently challenged, or are unclear about what they should be doing.

102. Teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4 is generally good; it is very good in the sixth form. The quality of teaching is the major reason why students achieve high standards in English. At its best, teachers make students think for themselves and apply their knowledge, understanding and skills to new situations or demands. Planning is thorough, the pace is smart, activities are varied and teachers use questions to probe and develop students' responses. In less successful lessons, there is too much direction by the teacher, few opportunities for students to think for themselves, and too little demand in tasks.

103. Word-processing is used to enhance work, especially at KS4, but opportunities for using ICT are limited at KS3. More opportunities to use ICT for research, and for planning and drafting, would enhance the development of students' presentational skills and their understanding of current technologies.

104. Since the last inspection, the department has revised units of work and refined groupings to ensure that students are given work appropriate to their abilities. The lack of an overall departmental scheme of work occasionally compromises progression and continuity. The department is led professionally and efficiently, but there is little formal monitoring or evaluation of teaching and learning.

Mathematics

105. At KS3 in the 1998 national tests students attained above the 1998 national average for level 5 and well above for level 6, although they were above those for similar schools. The 1999 results were significantly better than those for the previous year. There was not a significant difference between the results for boys and girls. The results were better than those for the other core subjects.

106. At GCSE students attained significantly better than the national average for grades A* to C and slightly lower for A* grades. This was similar to the previous year's results. The results were above those for similar schools. Again, there was no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls and little difference between results students attained in most other subjects. The percentage of students attaining A* to G grades has been just below 100% for the past few years and is above national average figures.

107. At A level the group all attained grades A to E thus maintaining the school's tradition of all students passing this examination. The size of the group makes comparison with national figures inappropriate but the aggregated figures for the past three years are significantly higher than the national figure for grades A to E and similar to the national figures for the higher grades A/B.

108. The results in tests and examinations are above the input profile for the school, which the school assesses as a little above the national average. The results in public tests and examinations indicate that students make good progress in their studies across the key stages and in the sixth form.

109. From lesson observations and the inspection of students' work at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form it is clear that attainment broadly follows these test and examination results. By the end of both key stages, students attain slightly above national average standards. By the end of Y13 A level students attain in line with average national A level

results.

110. Students generally attain slightly or well above the national averages in all aspects of the subject at both key stages. The department discourages the general use of calculators at KS3 and is trying to raise standards of basic numeracy in lessons by having short oral tests and games to warm up or to end lessons. It is too early to judge the effect of this strategy, but it is very appropriate that the school is considering the introduction of a numeracy policy for all subjects. Attainment in the space and shape and data handling attainment targets is generally better with some very good examples of students' work on symmetry and surveys displayed on classroom walls. Students enjoy working on investigations and their good progress is evident in the increased depth and complexity as students move up the school. Particularly good work was seen in a Y11 investigation which successfully analysed the correlation between population and area of countries of the world. Students use their knowledge of mathematics successfully in several subjects. They used measurement in the materials and food component parts of design and technology, plotted experimental results in science, plotted climatological data in geography and used fractions in music. In mathematics lessons students use calculators accurately and generally appropriately. Recently graphical calculators have been introduced and were used very effectively in a Y10 lesson to illustrate clearly and quickly the relevance of slope and intercept of straight lines. Information technology is incorporated in the mathematics curriculum at KS4 and particularly good use of it as a tool was seen in two Y10 classes. In general however the information technology skills learned in information technology lessons are not used or exercised routinely in mathematics lessons. The department has no modern computers. Students' standards of presentation are satisfactory and often good in higher attaining classes. Students with special educational needs attain appropriate standards. Students' attainment in the sixth form is good and they displayed skill in manipulating algebraic functions and in the effective use of the differential calculus. They also successfully learn how to make good mathematical models of aspects of the real world.

111. Progress in lessons is linked to teaching at both key stages. When teaching is good or very good students make good or very good progress. Progress is particularly evident in the development of new skills. Progress is generally good in all attainment targets other than in aspects involving basic numeracy. Students with special educational needs make appropriate progress.

112. In the sixth form, students make great progress in their understanding of mathematics. They apply skills in algebraic manipulation and in calculus which involve considerable intellectual development. The small A level groups make good progress in lessons and attain competence in many aspects of pure and applied mathematics.

113. In general, students at both key stages have a positive attitude to learning and using mathematics. They respond well to stimulating teaching. They are very sensitive to the needs of students requiring special help. In lessons they discuss their understanding of topics and to use appropriate mathematical terms. They enjoy investigations and topics using data from the real world. In some lessons they work well in pairs. Occasionally in a less well-controlled lesson they get a little noisy, but they respond to firm, but sensitive, control. In the sixth form students are very mature and responsible in all aspects of lessons.

114. All teaching is at least good and one third of it is very good. This is a significant improvement on the previous inspection. Lessons are well prepared and teachers know their subject material. They know their students well and understand the necessary approach to get the best out of them. They vary activities well to keep interest up and often

start or end lessons with some mental work. Lessons are generally well paced. Teachers are generally very good at maintaining control of their classes. Good use is made of overhead projectors. ICT is used well as a resource in some lessons. Everyday experience is, however, not used sufficiently to help stimulate students' interest. Homework is used effectively to complement class work, but students at KS3 and KS4 unfortunately do not have a textbook to take home. Students do, however, generally have appropriate books of exercises for homework. Teachers are very sensitive to the needs of all students and relationships are a strength of teaching. They use praise very effectively both in the classroom and in marking. Particularly effective teaching was seen in some lessons with classes with a high proportion of students with special educational needs. This was because the teachers showed particular sensitivity to the needs of individuals. Teachers use assessment well in class to plan further learning. In some less successful lessons teachers spend too long on one part of a lesson and students' attention drops.

115. The new head of department has quickly taken his place as leader and instituted several positive changes in the department. These are well directed at improving students' attainment to the utmost.

116. Overall the department has made considerable progress since the previous inspection. It gives good value for money.

Science

117. In 1998 the results of National Curriculum tests in science at the end of KS3 were above the national average and about average for schools having a similar intake. The results in 1999 were much the same. In recent years boys' results have been better than those for girls, but in 1999 the girls' results were better. Over the last three years the levels reached by students in science were well above the national average and similar to those in English and mathematics.

118. At the end of KS4 the proportion of students gaining the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE examinations in 1998 was in line with the national average and above average for schools having similar intake. Results in 1999 were much the same. A good feature of the results in both years was that all students were entered and almost all gained a grade. Girls did a little better than boys in gaining the higher grades. The results were similar to those in mathematics but not as good as in English.

119. In the sixth form A level results have been consistently well above national averages in biology and chemistry, but recent physics results have been a little below. All those students entered for biology, chemistry and environmental science passed in 1999 and a high proportion gained A or B grades in biology and chemistry.

120. In lessons and the written work seen during the inspection, students in Y9 and Y11 are on target to meet national expectations by the ends of KS3 and KS4. At KS3 their attainment is lower than in the National Curriculum tests because their investigative skills are not well developed. A significant minority of students in middle and lower attaining groups at both key stages attain less highly than they should because they are insufficiently challenged by the work set.

121. Students make satisfactory progress across both key stages. Their progress in lessons is satisfactory overall, but there are significant variations. For example, in one Y9 lesson students made very good progress when they discovered the numerical relationship between the force and its distance from the pivot in balancing a beam. However, in over

one third of lessons at KS3 and KS4 students' progress is unsatisfactory because the work does not interest them and they make insufficient effort, as in Y9 when they copied information about atomic structure from worksheets.

122. In the sixth form the attainment of Y13 students in lessons is well above expectation for their courses. They make good progress because teachers' own enthusiasm is transmitted to their students; they concentrate very well and often demonstrate enjoyment through their involvement in lessons.

123. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to others. However, when an additional adult supports their work in the laboratory there is insufficient focus on the meanings of key words.

124. Students' practical skills are satisfactory and they are beginning to use information and communication technology in scientific applications. They write well, though in a limited range of styles. Their numerical skills are not systematically developed.

125. Students usually behave well and concentrate throughout the full length of lessons, but in some lower attaining groups inattention by a few students wastes time for all. In the best lessons questioning develops into two-way dialogue because teachers demonstrate that they value each student's contribution.

126. Teaching shows significant variations. At KS3 and KS4 teaching is unsatisfactory in too many lessons (nearly one third), but it is good, often very good, in nearly half. In the sixth form teaching is good and there are no unsatisfactory lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge, often demonstrating their own enthusiasm and engaging the interest of students through their lively approach, particularly in the sixth form. In the best lessons they give helpful hints to aid learning, as when comparing the arrangement of plant cells with bricks in a wall, and encourage students to find out for themselves, as when investigating osmosis in potatoes in Y10. Teaching is unsatisfactory in many lessons with middle attaining groups because the work is insufficiently well matched to students' levels of attainment. For example, in Y11 they repeated earlier work on food tests without carrying it further forward and in Y10 they were told what observations were expected before using microscopes to look for differences between plant and animal cells. In other lessons the work is not well focused and the main learning points are lost; in Y10 a lesson about differences between chemical and physical change degenerated into looking at colour changes. Marking is inconsistent. A few teachers provide personalised comments for students indicating what they should do to improve but, too frequently, students' work is acknowledged with little more than a tick.

127. A new head of department is giving a clear lead to the work of the department, but much remains to be done. There is insufficient emphasis on the investigative nature of science or its relevance to students' own lives, and the use of assessment to track students' progress and set targets for their attainment is unsatisfactory. The stock of textbooks is insufficient to allow students to keep a book at home and this restricts the tasks set for homework. Several laboratories are in need of refurbishment to provide more stimulating spaces for students to learn science. The laboratory technicians provide a good service in support of teaching but have insufficient time to extend their role as more investigative work is introduced. Some teachers give up their time to provide extra 'help' sessions and these are much appreciated by students.

128. Response to the last inspection report has been limited, but a new head of department is beginning to implement changes. GCSE results are similar, although A level

results have improved. Many of the deficiencies in teaching and under-attainment by some students noted in the last report still remain. There is now an assessment policy (although its benefits have yet to be seen), and students are starting to make more use of information and communication technology.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

129. Teacher assessments for the end of KS3 in 1999 graded two fifths as working towards the expectation, and three fifths as achieving the expectation or beyond. In these assessments the performance of girls was slightly better than that of boys.

130. Attainment at the end of KS3 is average. Students have satisfactory technical skills to record ideas and make effective use of the characteristics of a range of materials, tools and techniques to develop their ideas, for example wax scratch to develop designs for banners for Pershore Abbey. Little evidence of expressive or imaginative work, or work in three dimensions was seen and some underachievement was noted in Y9. Critical appraisal of their own and others' work is underdeveloped.

131. GCSE results over the last four years have been well above national averages except for 1997 when they were in line with national averages. No analysis is available to show how well students attained in art compared with their other subjects. Though more girls than boys took the examination in 1998 and 1999 boys attained better at grades A*-C than girls.

132. At the end of KS4 attainment is above average. For example students' work in cubist style using oil pastels effectively is of at least average standard and in many cases is better than average showing good use of colour, satisfactory composition and knowledge of a representative selection of cubist artists.

133. A level results for art in 1998 were well above national averages for all maintained comprehensive schools, with three-fifths of students attaining grades A-B and all students attaining grades within the range A-E. Although performance in 1999 was not quite as good the small numbers taking the subject do not allow useful comparisons to be made.

134. Attainment in the sixth form is above average with evidence of very good drawing and painting skills. However, there appears to have been some loss of momentum over the summer and students are behind schedule. Personal studies are not sufficiently advanced, and there is not enough work from some students to show depth of study. Students are vague about the syllabus requirements and about deadlines for the completion of work. There are recent signs that students are working more positively, for instance in the work done with a visiting artist.

135. Students' progress at KS3 is satisfactory. Students enter the school with modest skills in art and the department is successfully improving observational drawing and painting skills rapidly in Y8. However, time in Y9 is limited so that it is difficult to accelerate students' progress. For example, Y9 students develop satisfactory designs based on Art Nouveau patterns, but not more than this.

136. Progress at KS4 and the sixth form is good. For example, Y11 make good progress in observational drawing and composition in the style of the Cubists. Y13 make good progress in developing use of measures and tonal values, as a result of good teaching. All

groups of students progress as well as others of similar prior attainment. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

137. Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are satisfactory at KS3 and good at KS4 and in the sixth form. Students are interested in art and many opt to take the subject for GCSE and A level. Most students sustain concentration well, but a small proportion of students in lower sets are easily distracted. Students are generally well behaved.

138. The quality of teaching is good at all key stages. For example teachers' knowledge and understanding, and expectations of students are good. Planning, methods and organisation are sound, but the structure of some lessons could be improved with more demonstrations by teachers and by giving more opportunities for review and appraisal. Students are well managed and good use is made of assessment and homework. Documentation of departmental policies is good, but the schemes of work, in the process of being revised, are not yet complete. The new acting head of department gives a strong lead, providing good direction and support for the newly qualified assistant, and the part time teacher.

139. Since the last inspection GCSE examination results have improved, and there has been improvement at A level. At KS3 some of the criticisms made then still apply, for instance with regard to three-dimensional work and critical studies, and the need to broaden the range of teaching and learning strategies. The quality of teaching has improved markedly since the last report when it was judged to have shortcomings at all levels. Accommodation is better than it was, though the kiln room is still used inefficiently.

Business education

140. Attainment in GCSE business studies was above national averages in 1998, and in 1999 58% of students gained grades A*-C. In spite of annual variations in the attainment levels of students taking the course, results have shown steady improvement. Their results in this subject are as good as, and often better than in their other subjects. In 1998 boys achieved slightly better grades than girls, a situation reversed in 1999.

141. Attainment in sixth form courses is also good. In A level economics and business studies results improved this year over last, although there are fewer than expected higher grades (A/B). Girls achieved slightly better results than boys, although in 1998, two boys were amongst those achieving the highest national scores. Results in GNVQ business are well above national expectations and as results have improved, more students are taking the course.

142. Attainment at KS4 and post-16 is at least satisfactory and often good. Students in Y10 have a very good knowledge of business activity, writing or speaking confidently about diversification or aspects of marketing activity and understand the relevance of financial analysis, such as break-even graphs, or risk assessment. In Y11 students use appropriate business terminology with confidence and apply sound strategies to a range of tasks, especially financial. Students' computer skills are particularly impressive. In the sixth form, students continue to make extensive use of ICT skills, including the use of the Internet.

143. Progress is good at both key stages for students of all levels of attainment. Sound subject knowledge is built up each lesson and analytical, presentational and evaluative techniques are systematically improved through a range of classroom experiences and individual research. Teachers identify individual needs, and devise strategies to assist

students, for example the use of word games to assist recall and expand vocabulary. Students are encouraged to measure their own progress by reflecting on what has been learnt in a particular lesson, and to take pride in their achievements. By the end of the key stages, students are able to express informed opinions on a wide range of relevant issues.

144. Students' responses to their teachers, and their behaviour in lessons, are very good both at KS4 and in the sixth form. They are always keen to contribute to question and answer exchanges, or with comments on contemporary economic issues. Classrooms in the business suite are attractive, with appropriate resources and relevant wall displays; for example that charting the progress of an exciting stock market competition involving all teaching groups.

145. The quality of teaching makes a major contribution to the success of the department. Teaching is never less than satisfactory at both key stages and is more often good or very good. Staff are well qualified, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject and communicate this enthusiasm to learners. Teachers make good use of encouragement and praise, and the merit mark system is valued. Individuals' work is monitored and assessed regularly, with helpful diagnostic or formative comments consistent with examination standards. Lesson content is enhanced by the considerable business experience of the teachers in the department. There are many innovative features, noted above, designed further to raise students' achievements.

146. The department is very well led, administered and managed. Many of its good features result from the head of department's consultative and reflective leadership, meticulous record-keeping, planning skills, and strategies for sharing good practice, as well as the energy and enthusiasm of the whole team.

147. Since the last inspection standards in the provision and quality of business education have risen.

Psychology

148. GCE A level psychology is a popular subject and students are achieving well above national expectations for the course. The proportion of candidates achieving the highest grades A-B is about twice the national average; 64% in 1998 and 56% in 1999, and none failed.

149. Attainment amongst present students is very good. Students make confident evaluations of a range of approaches, such as the interactionist views of Skinner on reductionism or the nativism of Chomsky or Lenneberg, use appropriate vocabulary with ease in a variety of oral and written presentations and are encouraged to think critically, for example when analysing Freud's research framework or relating theory to human behaviour.

150. The quality of teaching is a strength. The teacher is enthusiastic and knowledgeable, has high expectations of learners, prepares lessons thoroughly and gives prompt and helpful feedback for written and other work.

Vocational Education

151. GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses are offered to sixth form students in both health and social care and business. Present standards are at least satisfactory in all respects, with good and very good features. Both attainment standards and course

completion rates are above national averages and the courses are attracting increasing numbers of students.

152. Teaching is never less than satisfactory, and often good. Lesson planning is especially well managed in advanced health and social care, where classes contain students from both Y12 and Y13. Students acquire good planning and research skills and work to assignment deadlines. Good progress is made in relation to learners' previous levels of attainment and analysis indicates that individuals' GNVQ achievements are adding value to KS4 performances. Students enjoy their studies, and are clearly proud of their achievements. Key skills are delivered effectively through both discrete and integrated tasks. Students' ICT skills are particularly impressive. There are good work experience arrangements.

153. GNVQ programmes and the large teaching team are administered and managed very effectively by the vocational courses coordinator. The majority of the teaching team hold assessor awards and many have taken part in a recent programme of industrial placements. Accommodation for health and social care students is less than ideal. Students have no base room and frequently work in cramped classroom conditions.

154. The school has improved upon the provision and standards noted in the previous inspection.

Design and technology

155. Results in the 1999 GCE A level home economics and design and technology examinations were around the national averages for the previous year. In the range of 1999 GCSE examinations students in most examination courses achieved results that were above or well above national averages, an improvement on 1998.

156. In lessons, students at KS3 achieve results which are in line with national standards. KS3 students have a satisfactory knowledge of a range of processes, tools and equipment. In a project to make a metal trowel they learn much about the properties of the materials. They know about various tools and techniques needed to accurately mark out, to cut, to join and properly finish their artefacts. In textiles, they demonstrate satisfactory problem-solving skills when they work on a project to produce a greetings card that combines card and fabric. They disassemble a bag and gain a sound understanding of the processes used to make it. In all materials areas they demonstrate appropriate awareness of health and safety considerations. They work with a satisfactory level of accuracy and produce effective sketches and drawings to communicate what they intend to make.

157. KS4 students have good practical skills and work to good levels of tolerance as they design and make artefacts. In food technology they have a good awareness of the need for quality control procedures and can produce detailed specifications for their projects. Students following the electronic products course carry out good quality research when producing their designs. They make good evaluations of existing products. Metalwork students use design skills well to develop ideas for projects that respond to human needs. Woodwork students demonstrate good practical skills when they design and produce large artefacts, such as coffee tables. The standard of finish is often very good. Graphics products students use a wide range of graphic techniques which they use to good effect in their projects. Some students make very good use of information technology to present their research findings.

158. Students in the sixth form achieve satisfactory standards in their home economics

and design and technology courses. In home economics they research their chosen topics well though some students do not sufficiently define their areas of study and fail to focus their research adequately. They display sound practical skills and investigational techniques. Design and technology students have good design and making skills, and show that they understand the aesthetic elements of designing. They are able to take a historical perspective and understand progress in design and aspects, such as mass production.

159. The content of the KS3 courses is designed to promote better progress in making than in designing. As at the time of the last inspection, students are better at making than designing. The department has decided to equip KS3 students in the two years with the practical understanding they require to develop their designs at KS4. Progress is good in various aspects of the courses at this key stage, notably in health and safety awareness and practical skills, especially the knowledge and use of tools and equipment and in the accuracy of measurement. In the Y10 woodwork course in their first project, students build on the practical skills they develop in the preceding key stage to make dovetail and housing joints to a good standard. In metalwork they apply good skills to challenging projects that require high standards of accuracy and finish. Students of electronics successfully develop their knowledge and understanding of electronic systems in projects that are often very challenging and which involve the use of a good variety of components. In food technology and in textiles, good progress is made in research, the drawing up of specifications based on research and in the planning and organisation of work. Sixth form students make sound progress overall. Projects in design and technology are challenging and require the application of a wide range of skills and processes. There is good progress in development of projects through testing and evaluation, where drawing and modelling do not give sufficient information, for example in a motorcycle ramp project. In home economics, students make at least sound progress in their practical investigations.

160. Attitudes to learning are good overall. The sixth form courses are popular. Concentration in lessons is good and students follow safe and hygienic working practices. Students develop their capacity for personal study at KS4 in the research they undertake for the subject. They clear up after work in practical lessons. They have developed good relationships with their peers and teachers. They show good initiative in following personal interests in the projects they choose at KS4 and in the sixth form.

161. Teaching is good. Teachers have good subject understanding which is evident in the quality of the introductions they give to lessons and in the feedback offered to students through marking and discussion as practical work progresses. Teachers have high expectations of their students. Planning is good and provides very clear and challenging deadlines. The management of students is good, as are standards of discipline. Assessment is clear and manageable and teachers have a good understanding of the standards individual students reach. Homework is appropriate though teachers do not make enough of the potential for research and evaluation in this time.

162. The department is well led and teachers work well together as a team. Work is well supported by the technicians, though the time allocated for home economics is very low. Schemes of work for KS3 are satisfactory and follow the National Curriculum programmes of study, with an emphasis on making. There is need to develop schemes of work supported by design booklets that place a stronger emphasis on aspects of design.

Geography

163. Attainment is above average at KS4. 1998 GCSE results for grades A* - C were

above the national average, with a steady improvement over the past three years. Results for grades A*-G were also above the national average with a hundred percent pass rate. All the students sitting the Certificate of Achievement attained a Merit grade. Attainment is also above average in the sixth form. GCE A level results for grades A-B were above the national average in 1997 and 1998 and students achieved a 100% pass rate. In 1999 teachers also assessed attainment as above average at KS3, with girls achieving better results than boys. Work observed indicates that these high standards are being maintained with the students of both sexes at all levels of attainment.

164. At the age of 14 most students have a firm grasp of the principles of mapwork. They can explain, describe and make comparisons, both verbally and in writing, with great competence. Y9 students can use information technology to illustrate, edit and present information. At KS4 students can develop hypotheses, carry out investigations and present the results appropriately. There is a high standard of coursework ready for submission. Sixth form students are confident in discussion. A lesson on analysis of soil profiles, following up their fieldwork, showed that they understood how to use scientific equipment in a laboratory situation to test hypotheses and gather further data.

165. Progress is good at all key stages. Unsatisfactory progress was only observed in one lesson, where the work was insufficiently challenging. Progress was most notable in lessons where students were stimulated by a variety of activities and ideas. Students with special needs also make good progress due to the attention that is given to developing their skills.

166. Most students are interested in their lessons and keen to do their best. Responses to questions and other stimuli are generally observant and enthusiastic. Where poor behaviour was observed it was due to the slow pace of the lesson or the use of inappropriate activity.

167. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. Lessons are well planned with clear aims and objectives, though there was some lack of variety in teaching styles. Teachers are generally confident in their management of students and expect high standards of work. Following the comments on teaching and learning styles in the last inspection, new strategies have been considered, for example the learning styles of boys in order to improve their performance. Leadership is effective and the department is constantly monitoring and evaluating its work. Since the last report, fieldwork and information technology have been thoroughly integrated into the subject's scheme of work.

168. Accommodation for the subject is less than satisfactory, with three teaching rooms scattered around the school and insufficient storage space. This makes the work of teachers more difficult than it need be, because of the constant movement of resources and the lack of opportunity for teachers to support each other. This shortcoming was commented on in the last inspection.

History

169. GCSE results at grades A* to C were below national averages from 1996 to 1998, although in 1999 were much better, 69% of students achieving these grades. At A level it is more difficult to identify trends because of the varying number of students taking the subject from year to year. In recent years, results at grades A and B have been below national averages, except in 1997 when they were above.

170. Students' attainment towards the end of KS3 is above the nationally expected level. Students have a basic chronological framework which they use to make sense of the work they are doing. They use sources successfully to extract information and address historical questions. The quality of oral work is good and students' writing is usually well presented; higher attaining students in Y9 produce well-structured, accurate writing, for example on aspects of the slave trade.

171. At KS4 attainment by Y11 students is above national averages and reflects the improved standards demonstrated in this year's GCSE results. Most students are mastering the content of the course, and make effective links between different parts of their work on the 20th century. Students' historical writing is competent and well based, with higher attainers able to produce persuasive, analytical essays, for example on Britain's contribution to the allied victory in the First World War. At this stage in the year attainment in the sixth form is above the national average. Most Y13 students have a good grasp of the course content; they are able to use a range of sources successfully and are becoming familiar with differing interpretations of issues in 19th century British and European history.

172. Most students make good progress in history at KS3. They extend their knowledge of different periods and develop relevant skills. They build successfully on earlier work. Students at KS4 and in the sixth form also make good progress; they are well motivated and prepared to work hard at the subject. Most students enjoy history and the subject is popular at examination level. Behaviour in lessons is good. Levels of concentration are high and students work well together in class.

173. The quality of teaching is nearly always good and occasionally very good; it is never less than satisfactory. Teachers know their subject very well, and have high but realistic expectations of what students can achieve. Lesson planning is usually good although sometimes the work does not take sufficient account of different levels of attainment within the class. Teachers use a good range of methods, and their explanations and questioning are particular strengths. Students are managed well, lessons are taken at a good pace and work is marked carefully.

174. The absence of a substantive head of department over the last three years means that some of the problems identified in the last inspection have not been fully addressed, for example the development of IT in history. However, the recently appointed head of department is tackling some of these issues very effectively. Schemes of work have been revised and more rigorous assessment procedures are in place at KS3. The department is now well placed to make good progress, especially in developing greater consistency of approach at KS3 and in developing a wider range of teaching styles.

Information technology

175. In the 1999 A level computing examinations students achieved results that were around the national average for the past few years. Most KS4 students were entered for the 1999 Key Skills examination and achieved a satisfactory pass rate. Of the substantial number of students entered for the GCSE information systems examination, over 60% achieved A*-C grades, above national average.

176. In the IT classes at KS3, students reach standards which are around those expected nationally. All students follow a well-planned and taught IT course. They satisfactorily consolidate their word processing skills when writing about computers in everyday life. They develop their views on the impact that computers have on the world about them. They can find their way about the menus in a commercial software program

that is different to that which most have used in previous schools. They learn how to create databases and how to get information from them. Many are able to access the Internet successfully using the systems in the school library or computers at home. The results of their searches are sometimes used in schoolwork, especially in design and technology. In IT lessons KS3 students also learn ways in which computers can measure and control external events. They can use a simple programming language to control the movement of a pointer on the computer screen. They are able to find their way about a spreadsheet and can model financial information.

177. At KS4, students build upon the basic skills gained in the preceding key stage. All students receive the benefit of a dedicated IT course. Those following the GCSE Information Systems course achieve good standards overall, acquiring the range of skills and areas of knowledge and understanding set down in the National Curriculum. Y11 students in this GCSE course develop a good understanding of a range of factors to be considered when approaching systems analysis. They successfully acquire an understanding of matters such as access, security, updating of systems and the need to make informed choices when choosing software.

178. Sixth form students achieve standards in A level computing that are at least satisfactory. They learn about data types and data structures. They have a sound knowledge and understanding of systems analysis and systems design. They acquire a practical understanding of information processing requirements and know about the use of macros and data portability.

179. The progress made by students is at least satisfactory. Y8 students make satisfactory progress when they develop their word processing skills on a system new to them and they quickly learn how to use the menus. Students of lower attainment in Y9 make good progress in relation to their abilities when they follow a software package that is designed to teach them the National Curriculum IT. They make good gains in their understanding of the mechanics and applications of spreadsheets. Y10 GCSE students satisfactorily develop their understanding of devices used to capture information for computers. For example they learn about the devices that are used in supermarkets to recognise goods and to register and process that information. They know what is recorded and the use to which the information is put. Y11 students make at least satisfactory progress learning to use a commercial database. Sixth form students following the computing course make progress that is satisfactory, or better, in developing their understanding of complex concepts in computing such as floating point arithmetic.

180. Progress in IT in other subjects is unsatisfactory. This was the case at the time of the last inspection. Though some departments offer courses which help reinforce what is gained in specialist IT lessons, the use of IT is restricted and inhibits the progress students make in developing skills. At KS3 there is some data logging in science and some work with Logo in mathematics. At KS4 business education and GNVQ students reinforce skills in a range of software applications. There is no scheme of work in the school to co-ordinate and promote the experiences students have of IT, and the limited availability of computers in departments does not help.

181. Specialist courses in IT are popular. Concentration is good in lessons and little or no time is lost. Students are well motivated to undertake private study and many produce well presented coursework generated on home computers. Behaviour in the IT rooms is good. Students are polite and respond well to questions, advice and instruction. They work together well and are open and helpful to others.

182. Teaching is good in the lessons dedicated to IT. The two principal IT teachers and the IT technician have all a good level of subject knowledge for the courses they teach. They have high expectations of their students and use challenging language that extends understanding. Challenge in the sixth form groups is often very good, as is the pace of these lessons. Teachers use a good variety of teaching methods, including role play, and discipline is always good.

Modern languages

183. After the last inspection GCSE results in French slipped from above average but have been climbing back since 1997. School results of 45% A*-C in 1998 were just above the last available national average of 41%. In 1999 51% of students attained grades A*-C. Results in German, the second foreign language, begun by all students in Y9, but a GCSE option, have fallen steadily to below average, possibly because of the limited time available to build up basic skills. In 1999 barely a quarter of candidates attained grades A*-C. In both languages numbers gaining grades A*-G, however, have regularly been above average. A level results have been above average for several years. SATs results at the end of KS3 are rising: over three-quarters of students in 1999 met national expectations, nearly a fifth exceeded them.

184. By the end of KS3 standards are good. Students accept the foreign languages as the main means of communication in the classroom, using them for example at registration to explain why classmates are away. They understand their teachers and grasp the essentials of authentic recordings. Most students are unambiguous in spoken French, going beyond the minimum in responses, with higher attainers for example describing others' appearance, interests and character at length. Their accents frequently contain the distinctive sounds of French. They obtain information effectively when reading short texts. All students write in sentences although lower attainers need some help to do so. Others can put several sentences together. Higher attainers write coherently in paragraphs. In German classes beginners are starting to manipulate the small range of language they have just learned.

185. By the end of KS4 attainment is satisfactory. In French listening and reading skills develop well for all. Higher attainers demonstrate, for example, good vocabulary and use of tenses in written work, including preparations for role-play in various situations. Average and lower attainers for example speak hesitantly, but intelligibly, describing features of their locality. Average attainers write better than they speak.

186. German written work is satisfactory, oral work is hesitant, needing support to sustain long exchanges. Lower attainers following the modular Certificate of Achievement course are meeting its requirements. Sixth form work in French and German is satisfactory, students demonstrating a wide range of attainment. They have good listening skills and converse well amongst themselves and with teachers. They have sound vocabulary and awareness of register. Students following the French for business course work well exchanging basic information unambiguously. Girls do better than boys, as nationally, but the gap is diminishing in response to school initiatives.

187. In about two thirds of lessons students built up skills at a predictable rate. In the remainder students moved forward faster than anticipated, helped by beginning French in Y6. Some Y9 students comment that time is short in two lessons a week to build up German skills similarly. Within lessons language is quickly reused, and, over time, vocabulary and structures are established and later manipulated appropriately in new contexts. In Certificate of Achievement classes students with special needs make good

progress. Elsewhere they tend to do less well, given limited focused attention.

188. Attitudes and behaviour in lessons are very good. Students are attentive. They relate very well to their teachers and work responsibly with each other in pairs. They are willing to try, unafraid to make mistakes. Few students currently take two languages at KS4, finding other options more attractive. Few students take A level languages in the Lower Sixth, but “French for Business” and the “taster” Japanese courses are popular.

189. Teaching is good and teachers use the languages extensively. They insist that students do so too. They generally plan varied activities, covering most if not all skills in each lesson, with suitable challenge and progression of difficulty. Most lessons move at a brisk pace. Homework consolidates classwork appropriately. Good discipline and relationships between teachers and students assist learning. Day-to-day marking is variable in the extent of focused supportive comments and targets, but there is a thorough and effective regular assessment system, introduced since the last inspection.

190. Departmental management is very good, analytical and forward-looking, and had already begun, for example, before the inspection to address the issues of attainment in German and of students with SEN.

Music

191. In 1997 all candidates entered for GCSE obtained grades within the range A*-C, in 1998 90% of candidates did so and in 1999 all candidates did so. The number of students is too small for any meaningful comparison with national averages, which they are well above, but they are excellent results. The only year in which boys were entered (1998) they did slightly less well than the girls. No analysis is available to show how well students attained in music compared with their other subjects.

192. Small numbers take A level, but in 1997 and 1998 all students obtained grades, ranging from B to E.

193. Teacher assessments for the end of KS3 in 1999 graded just over one fifth as working towards the expectation and almost four fifths achieving the expectation or working beyond, a very good picture. Girls attained better than boys by a considerable margin.

194. Attainment at the end of KS3 is above average. Students know and understand a good range of chords, devices such as ostinato, and can invent interesting melodies. They play keyboards confidently with good attention to pulse and musical detail. They critically appraise their own work and use musical vocabulary appropriately. There are good examples of such attainment in Y8 and Y9 compositions of Christmas songs and carols. Some underachievement was noted in lower Y9 set.

195. A good proportion of students (12%) enhance their attainment in music with additional instrumental lessons. Many such students further enhance their musical experience by participating in the numerous extra-curricular groups such as band, orchestra, choir and various chamber groups organised in this busy department. These students and the groups they support attain high and sometimes very high standards.

196. Attainment at the end of KS4 is above average, for example a Y11 students' composition for electric guitar, bass and trumpet showed very good knowledge and understanding of harmony, rhythm, dynamics and scoring. Students studying gamelan are able to sight read Baris Bapan, a Balinese example, accurately on percussion instruments,

controlling speed and with good ensemble. Students have a good knowledge of musical elements. Attainment in the sixth form is average, better in performance than in the more theoretical aspects.

197. Student progress during KS3 is very good. Y8 make very good progress consolidating their knowledge and understanding of melody writing. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress though some underachieve. Progress across KS4 is good. Y11 compositions develop well in the lessons seen. Progress in the sixth form is average. There can be little doubt that attainment and progress in the sixth form is hindered by the fact that because of small numbers a group has been created which includes a few lower sixth students embarking on the A level course, a few upper sixth in their second year of the A level course, and a few AS level students, who receive six lessons per week all together. From a teaching point of view trying to ensure good progress by all the students is difficult.

198. Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development at KS3 and KS4 are very good and in the sixth form are good. Students are interested in music. Around 120 learn musical instruments and a similar number participate in extra-curricular activities. Take up for GCSE and A level is relatively small. Students sustain concentration very well and are very well behaved. Many are motivated to work independently for considerable periods of time.

199. The quality of teaching at all stages is good. Some lessons were excellent, for example Christmas compositions in Y8, and a lesson on the gamelan in Y10. Others were less effectively planned and organised, for example a lesson in composition for lower attainers in Y8. Management of students and assessment are very good. The quality of the instrumental teaching is good and it is well organised. The head of department provides dynamic and highly committed leadership, and the quality of documentation for the department is exemplary.

200. Since the last inspection above average examination standards have been maintained and the quality of teaching has improved from 'sound with many good features' to good. Staffing is slightly more generous than it was. The provision of computers is improved and students make good use of the Logic and Sibelius software.

Physical education

201. Since students were entered for the first time in 1997, results at the higher grades in GCSE sports studies have remained well above the national average for all maintained secondary schools. Results compare very well with those achieved in other subjects in the school. Approximately 38 students are entered each year. A level students achieve higher grades in line with national averages. In 1998 A/B passes were below the national average but this year were well above.

202. Attainment at the end of KS3 is good. In games, students show sound individual skills and understand the basic principles of attack and defence. They follow a well-structured health related fitness programme and understand what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. High attainers in gymnastics perform movement which is characterised by continuity, good shape and use of space. Low attaining students in Y9 badminton cannot develop rallies due to below average hand-eye coordination and poor footwork. At KS4 attainment is at least in line with national expectations and in three out of four lessons is above. Students understand the components of fitness and accurately test and record performance. They can plan and perform effective tactics to beat an opponent. High

attainers in Y10 badminton show good technique and vary length and width to out-manoeuvre opponents. GCSE groups are on target to achieve beyond national expectations at end of KS4. The standard of written work is good, but lacks the enhancement of information technology. Most students can effectively plan and perform their own work. Evaluation of performance is less developed due to lack of opportunity in some lessons. Boys' and girls' attainment is similar in core physical education, but in GCSE and A level sports studies girls outperform boys.

203. Students' progress at both key stages and in the sixth form (A level) is good. Close liaison with partner middle schools aids continuity and progress at KS3. As students move through the school they increase their understanding of attack and defence principles and compose simple movement sequences into more complex ones. GCSE and A level students develop research, discussion and analytical skills. Students' progress is aided by well planned and challenging teaching. Students with special educational needs are fully integrated into lessons and make progress in line with other students. In a Y8 hockey lesson lower attaining students made progress beyond expectations due to the teacher simplifying skills tasks, instructions and rules. Students' attitudes to learning are good. They listen to instructions, communicate well in group work and confidently try new skills. Students react positively to questioning. The pace of lessons is brisk and students concentrate well. Relationships with teachers are good.

204. The quality of teaching is good at all key stages and in a third of lessons is very good. Subject knowledge is very secure. Lessons are well planned, and have clear learning objectives. Teaching meets the needs of most students, but in a small proportion of lessons the teacher allows too little participation by the students. In a Y9 health related fitness lesson students improved their planning, performing and evaluation skills, due to the availability of fitness testing equipment and data recording materials and appropriate guidance. Teachers' expectations are high, particularly with regard to performance, behaviour, kit and safety. Extension work for high attainers is readily available through extra-curricular sport but is not regularly used in lessons. GCSE and A level homework is set and marked regularly but use of information technology is rarely evident.

205. Statutory requirements for planning the National Curriculum are met and a broad and balanced programme is offered at both key stages. In the sixth form, A level sports studies is successfully established but opportunities for timetabled sport are poor. The department is well-led and curricular documentation is good. All major policies are in place. Appropriate assessment, recording and reporting procedures are in use. Development planning for the short term is good but lacks sufficient detail for the mid- and long term. Facilities are generally good and include a multi-purpose sports hall. Drainage problems exist on some pitches. The boys' changing room toilets need refurbishing. The department and other teachers organise a successful extra-curricular sports programme in which over a third of all boys and girls participate. The school has received a Sportsmark Award for the excellence of this provision and its community sporting links. Individuals and teams are successful at inter-school, district and county levels. The subject makes a considerable contribution to the social and moral development of students.

206. Since the last inspection GCSE and A level sports studies are successfully established. In the small gymnasium, curriculum adjustments now ensure safer practice and improved learning opportunities. Gymnastics equipment is still generally old but has improved due to sponsorship. The quality of both teaching and learning have improved from satisfactory to good since the last inspection.

Religious education

207. The small number of students who followed the full GCSE course achieved well above the national average for A*-C grades in 1998. The introduction of the short course GCSE for all students has led to a significant increase in the number taking an examination in religious education with 42% gaining A*-C grades in 1999. Results from the very small number taking the A level examination in 1998 were in line with the national average.

208. During both Key Stages 3 and 4 students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress overall to meet the standards expected by the locally Agreed Syllabus for the end of the key stages. At KS3 they have a sound knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the major world religions studied. They understand that religious belief has an influence on the actions and lives of believers. By the end of KS4 the majority of students have developed an understanding of religious concepts. In a Y11 lesson on moral and natural evil, students were able to relate these concepts to current situations. However, at both key stages there are too few opportunities for students to develop their own responses. Consequently attainment and progress in the reflective elements of the syllabus are not satisfactory and the students' skills in sharing their views with each other are not well developed.

209. Those students in the sixth form who are following the A level course are achieving in line with national expectations. However, attainment for the great majority is well below the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus. The religious education unit in the Y13 general studies programme is insufficient to give adequate consideration to all five themes required. Consequently this course does not allow students to reach the standards expected. Those students who are studying for four A level subjects have no provision at all. The school does not meet statutory requirements with regard to the provision of religious education for the sixth form.

210. Overall the attitudes of students are good at KS3 and satisfactory at KS4. The majority show an interest in the issues under consideration and present their work with care. One quarter of the current Y10 are so committed to their studies that they are willing to attend lunchtime lessons in order to take the full course GCSE. At both key stages students are able and willing to express their personal responses in writing when given the opportunity to do so. Many Y8 students wrote very perceptive poems on forgiveness and reconciliation after their visit to Coventry Cathedral. Commitment from those taking A level is very good.

211. The quality of teaching is good at KS3 and in the sixth form and satisfactory at KS4. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Strengths in teaching include very good specialist subject knowledge and understanding, challenging questioning and good relationships with students. Teaching is less successful where a heavy reliance on prepared notes, particularly at KS4, leads to the use of a restricted range of teaching styles and resources.

212. The department is well led. The well-structured scheme of work gives effective support to the teaching of religious education. Teachers work hard to create a positive learning environment. However, inadequate time is allocated to the subject. As a result students are unable to cover all elements of the syllabus at the level of which they are capable and there are too few opportunities for them to discuss their work, to share their thoughts and feelings or to reflect on the religious dimension of life.

213. Religious education makes a good contribution to the moral, social and cultural development of the students. They consider moral and social issues and their study of the major world religions gives them some insight into the cultures based on them. They

develop some understanding of the spiritual dimension of religious belief, but since the reflective elements of religious education are not given sufficient time and attention there are too few opportunities for students' own spiritual development.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

214. This report bases its judgements on the work of 14 inspectors spending a total of 53 inspection days in school. Extensive analysis was made before during and after the inspection of policy documents, schemes of work and other relevant statements. Parental views were sought and recorded via the standard questionnaire and parents' meeting. 177 hours were spent on lesson observations and sampling the work of all year groups, subjects and ability sets. Interviews took place with governors, the headteacher and all teachers with a significant management role as well as with non-teaching staff and representatives of the wider community. The work of a sample of students across all subjects was formally scrutinised by inspectors, together with that of other students seen in lessons. Discussions were held with samples of students from each year group.

DATA AND INDICATORS

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
Y8 – Y13	1012	18	172	98

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y8 – Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	58.10
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.42

Education support staff (Y - Y)

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked each week	410.6

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	78.0
--	------

Average teaching group size:	KS3	26
	KS4	23

Financial data

Financial year:	1999
-----------------	------

	£
Total Income	1996735
Total Expenditure	2002838
Expenditure per pupil	2130.68
Balance brought forward from previous year	3151
Balance carried forward to next year	-2952

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

1012

Number of questionnaires returned:

191

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	26	58	14	2	-
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	42	51	5	2	-
The school handles complaints from parents well	23	53	21	2	1
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	29	62	8	1	-
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	41	52	6	1	-
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	40	55	4	1	-
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	46	47	5	2	-
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	28	59	9	4	-
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	30	55	13	1	-
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	22	63	13	1	1
My child(ren) like(s) school	41	51	7	2	-

Other issues raised by parents

Parents commented very favourably on the leadership of the school.