

INSPECTION REPORT

HUMMERSKNOTT COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Darlington

LEA area: Darlington

Unique Reference Number: 114323

Inspection Number: 184022

Headteacher: Mr D Henderson

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe
1025

Dates of inspection: 11-15 October 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708100

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr D Jackson
Date of previous inspection:	30 January-3 February 1994

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Mr H Meggitt, Lay Inspector		Partnership with parents and community Accommodation
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Mr A F Barringer	English, drama	
Mr R Heath	Mathematics	
Mr C P Hewson	Science	Staffing
Mrs W Burke	Art	
Mrs S M Mansell	Design and technology Information technology	
Mr B M Greasley	Geography	Curriculum
Ms C Evers	History	Resources for learning Efficiency
Mr A E Nutton	Modern foreign languages	
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Mr R D Gaunt	Physical education	
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MAIN FINDINGS

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Pupils' overall standard of attainment is above average throughout the school.
- Most pupils behave well, work hard and make good progress.
- Pastoral care for pupils is supportive and effective; careers guidance is strong.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is particularly effective and a strength of the school.
- The quality of teaching is good overall and has improved significantly since the last inspection.
- The curriculum has good breadth and balance and meets all statutory requirements.
- The school has a wide range of facilities, resources and extracurricular activities.

WHERE THE SCHOOL HAS WEAKNESSES

- Pupils' overall attainment and progress could be still higher.
- The implementation and impact of policies are insufficiently monitored and evaluated.
- The school's development planning is too imprecise and short-term.
- Parents receive insufficient information about their children's progress and courses of study.
- Statutory requirements not met for collective worship, teachers' appraisal and full follow-up on matters of health and safety.

This is a good school, which has considerably 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

The school has made broadly satisfactory progress since 1994. It has improved to at least a satisfactory level some of the weaknesses identified then. The work set for pupils is now better matched to their levels of attainment. The assessment of pupils' progress is used more constructively to guide the planning of future programmes of study for them. Pupils' spiritual development is now promoted satisfactorily.

Senior management has not, however, done enough to dovetail satisfactorily policies operating at whole-school and departmental levels or to monitor and evaluate the impact of policies effectively. Weaknesses still remain in the level of pace and challenge in a significant minority of lessons. Provision for collective worship falls far short of what is statutorily required. Pupils' overall standard of attainment in GCSE examinations is about the same as at the last inspection. The school's teaching has improved noticeably.

Since 1994 the school has shown a broadly satisfactory capacity, but with important gaps, to improve its practice. Its management recognises the need to ensure consistency of performance and to secure still further improvement. The school gives a good indication of having the required quality of governance and management to make sound progress in the future.

STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 and 16 year-olds in national tests and GCSE examinations in 1998:

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

Attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is above average overall, although average in English at the end of Key Stage 3 and in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4. Overall attainment in other subjects of the National Curriculum and in religious education (RE) is above average throughout the school, except for the average level achieved by the end of Key Stage 3 in design and technology, information technology (IT), music and physical education (PE).

Results of the National Curriculum tests in Year 9 of Key Stage 3 in 1998 were, overall, well above average: mathematics results were highest and English results (though still about average) the lowest. In 1999 the results dropped significantly in English and science, but remained high in mathematics. Mathematics has performed best over the 1996-1998 period. The 1998 results were well above the average for schools of a similar kind. ["Similarity" is measured only by the proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals. This measure must be interpreted with caution, because this school has more pupils than usual from high social and economic backgrounds.]

Results in GCSE have been above the national average for the last few years – well above average for the proportion of pupils achieving at least five grades A*-C or as measured by pupils' average "points scores". In 1998 the proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades A*-G was (unusually) well below average, owing to very poor attendance by ten per cent of pupils in Year 11. The school's overall standard is well above that generally achieved in schools of a similar character. The strongest subjects in GCSE in 1998 (later national data not available) were English literature, design and technology, history, PE and RE. English language, mathematics, (double) science, computer studies, French and communication studies were, relatively, the weakest subjects. The major reason in school for pupils' rate of progress is the quality of teaching they receive, and in particular the pace and challenge they experience in lessons.

QUALITY OF TEACHING

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	(good in other subjects)	English
Years 10-11	Good	(good in other subjects)	Mathematics, business education
Sixth form	/	/	/
English	Good	/	/
Mathematics	Good	/	/

Teaching was at least satisfactory overall in 98 per cent of lessons, good in 65 per cent and very good in 12 per cent of those seen. Two per cent of lessons had unsatisfactory teaching. In the well-taught lessons pupils make good progress through clear explanations, a brisk pace and rigorous work. Unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by low intellectual demand, insufficient use of discussion, a slow pace or insufficient control of chattering pupils.

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

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Predominantly good both in class and around the school. The school is an orderly community. Only isolated instances of poor discipline.
Attendance	Broadly satisfactory last year, but improved to a good level since Easter 1999. Pupils' punctuality for school and for lessons is good.
Ethos*	The school has a good work ethic. Pupils show initiative and take sensible responsibility. Most pupils concentrate well and try hard. Pupils' relationships with their peers and their teachers are very good.
Leadership and management	Effective in most aspects. Governors and senior management have clear aims, values and goals. Middle management generally good. Consistent monitoring and evaluation of the school's work and performance are weak.
Curriculum	Good breadth and balance. Meets all statutory requirements. Strong careers education. Teaching time low. Very good range of extracurricular activities. Assessment system generally sound, but data used inconsistently.

Pupils with special educational needs	Provision and quality of work good. Work very carefully planned. Pupils usually make good progress. A strength of the school.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Good overall: provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development satisfactory, but other aspects strong. Provision for pupils' support and guidance good. Poor provision for collective worship.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Sufficient, appropriately qualified teachers. Support staff effective. Facilities good, but subject rooms scattered. Learning resources good, except for IT in subjects.
Value for money	Prudent financial management and control. Money spent carefully. Inefficiencies in heating and rooming. School provides good value for money.

* *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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the high attainment and good progress of pupils • the dedication and quality of most teachers • high effectiveness of pastoral care and the House system • the wide range of extracurricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the disruptive effect of a few pupils in class • insufficient information about what pupils learn • too little homework • study leave for GCSE starting too soon

Inspectors' judgements support the positive views parents express. The school enables most pupils to make good progress, but standards could be higher still. The quality of teaching is good overall. Pupils feel confident in the pastoral care they receive and both they and most parents feel that the House system makes a considerable contribution to this confidence. The school's extracurricular provision, both in and out of school and in this country and abroad, is extensive.

In contrast, inspectors agree that the school does not provide enough detailed information about the content of the curriculum or about pupils' attainments and progress in a fully consistent manner. A small minority of pupils chatter during lessons and are sometimes awkward. Study leave does begin early. The volume and quality of homework were, however, appropriate during the inspection.

Overall parents and the wider community (rightly) have a favourable view of the school.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

To enhance the good quality of education that pupils already receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:

improve still further pupils' attainments and progress by

removing, in a minority of teaching, the weaknesses noted in the body of the report (## 32 42-45 47 and in subject reports);

(●) ensuring that pupils (and especially those of high attainment) are always stretched intellectually by appropriately precise and rigorous questions, answers, discussions and tasks (## 17 20 29 44 53 122 129 131 135 147 174 217 222 226);

(●) injecting greater pace and challenge into the minority of slow-moving lessons (## 29 32 42 132 135 145 147-148 192 198 201 210 226 230);

(●) increasing the confidence and capability of pupils to apply their existing knowledge to new topics (## 130 174 197);

(●) evaluating pupils' potential and progress by a coherent analysis of data on their attainments across all subjects and across the school (## 13 26 59-60 62 80 137 165 193); and

increasing the time pupils are taught to at least the minimum 25 hours nationally recommended for Key Stage 4 (## 52 108).

manage the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the school's policies more effectively by

establishing clear systems of accountability for their implementation (## 54 79-80 89-91); and

systematically reviewing the quality of teaching, to consistent criteria, across all subjects (## 54 83 91);

incorporate within the school's planning for the future precise timescales, costings and success criteria and extend outline written planning for it beyond one academic year (## 92 107).

meet the concerns expressed by a minority of parents for more information by

ensuring that all reports to parents clearly indicate pupils' attainments and progress (## 61-62 84);

making details of courses of study readily available to all parents (## 84).

ensure that statutory requirements are met by

making a serious effort to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils (## 78 94);

systematically undertaking the formal appraisal of teachers (## 94 98); and

following up systematically the school's audit of health and safety matters (## 83 94 158).

In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action. These are indicated in paragraphs 17-19 20-22 34 37-38 48 51 54 57 63 70 75-77 84 87 100-101 103 109 and in subject reports.

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. The school is situated on an attractive, open site on the south-western side of Darlington. It serves an area which, although predominantly suburbanised with mainly private housing, has the extremes of social and economic characteristics. It has a fully comprehensive range of pupils, both in attainment and personal background: about half come from homes that are well above average socioeconomically, about a quarter from those that are well below average, and the rest from backgrounds that are at least average.
2. The school has 1218 pupils on roll and is larger than average. The number of pupils has been stable over the last few years. The school draws its pupils mainly from four primary schools, but educates pupils from up to 22 primary schools in the surrounding area. The headteacher has been in post since 1984.
3. The social and economic background of the pupils is very mixed, but is above average overall. The local government wards from which pupils come range from above (often well above) average in the case of about 70 per cent of pupils to well below average. The overall attainment of pupils before they come to the school varies, but is usually above that achieved by pupils nationally. The school has 34 pupils (2.8 per cent), a broadly average proportion, with statements of special education need. There are 47 pupils (3.9 per cent, a below average proportion) in the school from ethnic minority backgrounds. There are about 1.4 per cent of pupils in the school who speak English as an additional language, a proportion that is a little higher than average. About 13 per cent of pupils, a proportion that is broadly average by national standards, are known to be eligible for free school meals. In 1998 about two-thirds of pupils at the end of Year 11 continued with full-time education at 16.
4. The school's Improvement Plan and prospectus set out the school's main aims and values. These emphasise the pursuit of high academic standards, the provision of wide educational and cultural opportunities, and the inculcation of high standards of personal conduct and responsibility. The school's aims and objectives are in line with those widely adopted nationally.

The school's Improvement Plan identifies nine main themes as central priorities for action in the current academic year. These are to:

- raise pupils' achievements throughout the school;
- improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes;
- increase the range of information technology and staff's expertise in its use;
- improve the range and quality of monitoring performance;
- introduce more vocational courses and the National Literacy Strategy;
- appoint a few additional staff to implement planned changes of policy;
- improve the school's buildings, security and communication systems;
- increase the setting and monitoring of targets for pupils; and
- work towards achieving Language College status.

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	119	123	242

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	77 (69)	88 (88)	86 (90)
	Girls	91 (77)	80 (79)	87 (75)
	Total	168 (146)	168 (167)	173 (165)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	70 (61)	70 (70)	73 (69)
	National	65 (56)	60 (59)	56 (60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	28 (25)	51 (45)	38 (38)
	National	35 (22)	36 (36)	27 (29)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	75 (84)	83 (96)	88 (95)
	Girls	97 (85)	82 (82)	90 (85)
	Total	177 (169)	165 (178)	178 (180)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	76 (70)	69 (74)	75 (75)
	National	62 (60)	64 (64)	62 (61)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	40 (35)	43 (48)	42 (38)
	National	31 (28)	37 (37)	31 (29)

.....

1 Percentages in parentheses refer to 1997

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	114	116	230

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	66 (80)	97 (124)	108 (128)
	Girls	64 (72)	96 (102)	105 (104)
	Total	130 (152)	193 (226)	213 (232)
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	57 (61)	84 (91)	93 (94)
	National	45 (43)	90 (89)	95 (92)

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

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

.....

Percentages in parentheses refer to 1997

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year: 1997-1998			%
	Authorised	School	9.1
	Absence	National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised	School	0.8
	Absence	National comparative data	1.1

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year: 1998-1999		Number
	Fixed period	161
	Permanent	5

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	12
	Satisfactory or better	98
	Less than satisfactory	2

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

7. The overall standard of attainment of pupils in the school is above that expected nationally of pupils at the end of Key Stages 3 (in Year 9) and 4 (in Year 11). Pupils' achievement in national tests and examinations is usually above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and is well above average in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) by the end of Key Stage 4. Standards of attainment are broadly similar to those at the last inspection.

8. In the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998 the proportion of pupils who achieved the national standard of at least Level 5 was well above average in science, above average in mathematics and close to average in English. The proportion reaching at least Level 6 was well above average in mathematics and science, but below average in English. On the average "points" that pupils scored over the 1996-1998 period, their attainment was above average overall - well above in mathematics, above in science, but close to average in English. Over the 1995-1999 period, the school's tests results were highest in relation to national averages in 1995, and were lowest in 1996 and 1999. The trend of results over the 1996-1998 period has been slowly upwards in English, strongly upwards in science, and comfortably above national averages in mathematics throughout. Over the 1996-1999 period mathematics has performed strongest and English the weakest.

9. Based on their average points scores, girls were ahead of boys in the Key Stage 3 tests in English in 1998, but slightly behind them in mathematics and science. A similar pattern emerged in 1999 in the proportions of boys and girls who achieved either Level 5+ or Level 6+, although in English twice as many girls as boys achieved at least the higher Level 6. Overall, the boys in this school did slightly better than the girls in reaching the levels achieved nationally by their respective sexes. Teachers' overall assessments of pupils in 1997 and 1998 were generally similar to the average test results pupils' achieved, with the exception of English where they were higher.

10. When the 1998 Key Stage 3 results are compared with those in schools which have a similar background (as measured solely by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school performed very well. At Level 5+, for example, attainment was well above average in mathematics, very high in science, and above average in English. At Level 6+, attainment was again well above average in mathematics and very high in science, but average in English. Pupils' average points score was very high overall, particularly in mathematics and science. Inferences from the free school meals criterion must, however, be interpreted with a degree of caution in this school, because it has an above average proportion of pupils from high socioeconomic backgrounds.

11. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998, teachers judged the overall attainment of pupils currently in Year 11 as well above average in design and technology, geography and history, above average in modern foreign languages, and average in information technology (IT). Inspectors' judgements are that the overall standard of attainment of the pupils currently in Year 9 is above average in geography, history and modern foreign languages and average in design and technology and in IT.

12. In GCSE examinations in 1998 pupils' overall achievement was well above the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more of the higher grades A*-C, and above average for pupils' overall points score. The level was similar in 1999. The proportion gaining five or more grades A*-G in 1998 was well below average, but has usually been at least average; the drop in 1998 was largely

attributable to very low attendance by about ten per cent of pupils in Year 11. Over the period 1994-1999 the proportion of pupils gaining at least five of the higher (A*-C) grades was well above average; there was no trend in the school's average points score, whilst the national trend was rising. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more of the higher grades over the last six years was 56-63 per cent against a national average of 41-45 per cent. The proportion of the highest A* or A grades obtained in 1998 was about the national average, but was higher in 1999.

13. Over the period 1995-1997 girls achieved a much greater proportion of the higher A*-C grades in GCSE than boys, but at a declining rate, and in 1998 achieved less than boys: the lead of girls in gaining five or more higher grades decreased from 18 percentage points in 1995 to eight points in 1997 and to a deficit of three points in 1998. In 1999 the gap widened again to an 11-point lead in favour of girls. In contrast, the proportion of boys achieving this yardstick increased from 47 per cent in 1995 to 58 per cent in 1997 and 1998, dropping back to 52 per cent in 1999. Based on pupils' average points scores at GCSE, boys' results in 1998 were well above average, whilst those of girls were (unusually) about average. The limited evidence available about the intake of pupils suggests that girls and boys in this school are similar in overall attainment. The sexes have broadly similar attainment at the end of Year 9. By GCSE, however, girls usually achieve a higher overall level of results. The school has not investigated adequately the reasons for the different trends between the sexes, especially at Key Stage 4.

14. In the core subjects pupils' achievement of grades A*-C in GCSE in 1998 was well above the national average in English and mathematics, and above average in science. These results were nearly at the same level as those of 1997 in English, but significantly lower than the previous year's in the other two subjects. In 1999 the decline in English (and the slight decline in mathematics) continued, particularly for girls, but picked up a little in science – although in all three subjects pupils' overall attainment exceeded the provisional national averages. When pupils' performances are compared in the other subjects they took in 1998 (the latest year for which full sets of national comparative data are available), pupils did significantly better than in their other subjects in English literature, design and technology, history, physical education (PE) and religious education (RE), but worse in English language, mathematics, (double) science, computer studies, French and communication studies. No pupil achieved the highest A* grade in 1999 in music, and only one pupil did so in each of mathematics, biology, geography, French, religious education (RE) and drama.

15. When the school's results at GCSE in 1998 are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school generally performed well. Both its average points score and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C were well above average. Its rating was, however, well below average for the proportion gaining one A*-G grade or for that gaining at least five A*-G grades. Available evidence suggests that this stark contrast of ratings in 1998 reflects pupils' prior attainments and records of attendance.

16. In work seen during the inspection pupils' overall standard of attainment was higher than that expected nationally for pupils of similar ages at the end of both key stages. The overall attainment of boys and girls does not differ markedly: boys are a little ahead in mathematics and science, whilst girls lead a little in English. Attainment is broadly similar throughout the school.

17. In English the overall attainment of pupils is average in most aspects of work by the end of both key stages. Written work is average overall in the quality of its content and in pupils' competence in a range of styles: in a significant minority of cases, however, pupils do not consistently produce work with the length, depth, quality of expression and sentence structure to match their capabilities. The presentation and layout of work and pupils' spelling and punctuation are of an average standard overall. Pupils' standard of reading is average overall in clarity and accuracy. Their speaking and listening are generally good and above average, and pupils usually speak clearly and audibly.

18. In subjects other than English pupils' standard of reading is slightly above average in fluency and expression. Most pupils read aloud accurately and skim-read texts rapidly, although reading aloud in class is not a prominent or regular feature of most subjects. The reading room and library/resources centre help pupils considerably to widen their sources of information, capability in research and pleasure in reading.

19. Pupils' standard of writing varies very widely, but the overall standard is just a little above average. Most pupils write carefully in an appropriate style and length for the tasks they are set. In geography and history, for example, there are many examples of extended writing of an above average standard in coursework, mini-projects or booklets. A small minority of low-attainers, however, write very briefly, make frequent mistakes in spelling common words or have poor letter formation and tidiness. Work is usually, however, written up carefully - as, for example, in some research work in art. In mathematics, too, the strong emphasis on logical, precise writing and the use of correct terminology produce above average standards. Note-taking is average, but is infrequently practised or tutored. In science and PE, writing is sometimes constrained by too much straight copying. The presentation of work is, however, generally good and above average; that of boys is better than usual in a large number of cases.

20. Most pupils listen carefully and concentrate hard. A few pupils (usually boys) cause unnecessary distraction through silliness and chatter in a small minority of classes. Pupils' standard of speaking is above average overall in clarity and the accurate use of technical vocabulary, although a significant minority are insufficiently audible or very brief and imprecise in their answers. Pupils have the ability to discuss issues at length constructively and do so in a small minority of lessons, as for example in design and technology. Overall, however, they have insufficient opportunities to discuss facts and opinions at length. Oral work generally plays an undervalued part in lessons.

21. In mathematics the overall standard of attainment is above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and broadly average at the end of Key Stage 4. A substantial proportion of pupils throughout the school are, however, shaky in mental mathematics. In numeracy across the curriculum, standards of attainment are above average throughout the school in handling numbers competently and in representing data in its various forms. The range of ways in which numeracy is practised and the interpretation of graphs are, however, at a lower, average level. For example, pupils handle numbers competently in geography, but the range of statistical methods and analytical interpretations used is narrow. The use of calculators is better than often found, but pupils have a high degree of over-reliance on them.

22. Attainment in science is above average throughout the school. Pupils have a sound grasp of the basics of the subject and the majority apply the concepts they have acquired to new topics with reasonable confidence. Attainment in IT is average overall, but often above average in Key Stage 4. It is above average in design and technology and in music because of frequent use, good facilities and very confident staff. Standards are average in mathematics. It is, however, relatively infrequently used as a tool of learning in the majority of subjects.

23. In most other subjects the overall attainment of pupils is above what pupils achieve nationally. Their attainments are, however, average at the end of Key Stage 3 in design and technology, music and PE.

24. When pupils come to the school in Year 7, their overall attainment is, on the limited evidence available, above (sometimes well above) the average of pupils of the same age across the country. Overall attainment in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 1997 and 1998 was well above average, but dropped significantly in 1999. By the end of Year 11, pupils' achievements in GCSE have also been well above average over the last few years. These results and the standard of work seen during the inspection point to the school maintaining pupils' level of attainment and sustaining their progress soundly as they move through the school.

25. Most pupils make good progress overall in their studies both in lessons and over longer periods of

time. In half the classes pupils make good progress and in nearly a further tenth very good progress. Progress is broadly satisfactory, though with weaknesses, in nearly two-fifths of lessons, but inadequate in about three per cent. Pupils make a similar rate of progress as they move through the school. Girls and boys, in general, make similar progress.

26. The school has not analysed comprehensively all the information available about its intakes of pupils either for trends in performance or (for example) for differences of attainment by the sex of pupils. The evidence available, however, suggests that, overall, pupils make sound progress as they move through the school: pupils start the school in Year 7 with an overall level of attainment that is above (sometimes well above) average and end in Year 11 with GCSE results at the same high level. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) rated pupils' overall progress from Year 9 in 1996 to Year 11 in 1998 as satisfactory.

27. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 in English, IT and music, and in Key Stage 4 in mathematics and design and technology. They make good progress overall in all other subjects and in other key stages.

28. The generally good quality of teaching is a major reason why pupils usually make suitable progress in most of their work. Pupils are made aware of the importance of careful study and the standards they should aim to achieve. The school has a strong ethos of friendly, caring cooperation and mutual respect, built on the supportive attitudes many pupils bring from home. Most pupils behave very well, listen carefully and work hard.

29. A lack of pace, of intellectual challenge or of penetrating discussion impedes the progress of pupils, especially those of higher attainment, in a significant minority of lessons. In contrast, higher attainers nearly always make good progress in art, history and Latin. Pupils of average attainment make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics, art and music in Key Stage 3 and in science and in design and technology in Key Stage 4, but good progress elsewhere. Those with special educational needs usually make good progress because of their carefully planned programmes of work and well-structured teaching. Pupils for whom English is an additional language usually make good progress.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

30. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are predominantly good both in class and around the school. Pupils show initiative and take sensible responsibility, wherever they are given the opportunity. Their attitudes to work are good overall. In seven out of every ten lessons they show positive commitment, sustained concentration and work well to teachers' guidance. In nearly three out of ten lessons pupils' attitudes are satisfactory. In only a very small number of lessons do pupils show unsatisfactory attitudes and, consequently, fail to benefit from the good opportunities for learning that the school provides.

31. In the best lessons pupils respond with confidence to the high challenge and good pace of work set for them. There is a strong momentum in their learning that comes from the high expectations of their teachers. In a design and technology lesson in Year 7, for example, pupils readily understood what was expected of them and rose to the challenge of solving a fresh problem on electronics with great care and dexterity. In a German class in Year 11 pupils coped successfully with the challenge of conversing spontaneously and at good pace in the foreign language.

32. In those few lessons where attitudes are unsatisfactory, pupils do not easily or quickly settle to their work. In these cases teachers fail to establish an atmosphere of quiet, purposeful attention from the outset and do not challenge pupils to work to their capacity.

33. The school is an orderly community. There are only isolated instances of poor discipline.

Examples of unsightly graffiti and litter occur in only a limited number of areas of the school. The fabric of the building and its facilities are well respected. Pupils are usually courteous, polite and trustworthy.

34. Pupils' relationships with one another and with teachers and other adults are very good. Pupils work well in groups and show appreciation of other people's beliefs and efforts. Many older pupils take the opportunity to assume responsibility. There is, for example, a large number of prefects in Year 11. They contribute to the work of the school in an appropriate variety of ways, including the support, guidance and tutoring of the youngest pupils. The school council, in contrast, has been in abeyance for nearly a year, but, when active, involved many young people in positively considering important issues about the life of the school. The level of permanent exclusions rose recently from its normally very low level. The number of fixed-term exclusions is high for a school of this size, but this sanction is employed reasonably.

Attendance

35. The attendance of pupils is broadly satisfactory, but is slightly below the pattern of attendance nationally. In the last (1998-1999) academic year pupils' overall attendance was 90.1 per cent, the same level as in the previous year. The annual level of authorised absence (9.1 per cent) in 1997-1998 was above the national average, but the amount of absence without good reason ("unauthorised absence") at 0.8 per cent was a little below average.

36. Attendance in the last academic year was good in Years 7-8, a little unsatisfactory in Years 9-10 and unsatisfactory overall in Year 11. Attendance was, unusually, at its best (and good overall) in the summer term of 1999, when the attendance in Years 7-11 ranged from 91 to 94 per cent and was 92.5 per cent overall. This good pattern of attendance was maintained in the first half of the Autumn term 1999 and was also 92.5 overall. The improvement in attendance during 1999 is the direct result of increased monitoring and follow-up by the school and, importantly, of effective and vigorous intervention by the education welfare service.

37. The level of attendance dipped a little after the last inspection in 1994, but has recently returned to its previous good level. Although the school says nothing about the importance of good attendance or punctuality in its prospectus, it has highlighted these in newsletters. It puts a high degree of emphasis, particularly through the House system, on pupils attending regularly and punctually. During the last academic year the overall quality of keeping and monitoring registers was poor. Since September 1999 registers have, however, been accurately and carefully kept, owing to tighter monitoring and scrutiny from both inside and outside the school. The school has generally thorough systems for analysing pupils' attendance.

38. Pupils' punctuality for school and generally for lessons is good. The limited evidence available suggests that truancy after registration is not a problem: although registers are also kept for all lessons, there is no system of occasional random cross-checks to ensure that truancy is carefully curtailed.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

39. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is broadly satisfactory in a third of lessons and good in about half of them. Additionally, over a tenth of the school's teaching is very good. Only four out of the 212 lessons inspected had teaching that was unsatisfactory and needed obvious improvement. The quality

of teaching is very similar throughout the school. It has improved since the last inspection, especially in a substantial reduction in the amount of unsatisfactory teaching.

40. Most teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. As a result they usually give clear introductions to lessons and explain tasks precisely, setting new subject matter carefully into the pattern of what pupils already know. The best teaching is authoritative, stimulating and interesting. It is marked by a sensitive insistence, for example, on pupils' precise use of technical terms and on explaining their views carefully.

41. The majority of teachers set appropriately high standards for pupils. Their expectations are, overall, slightly higher at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Teachers expect thorough work and considerate behaviour. In the best lessons they ensure that much ground is covered in lessons, press pupils for accurate and thoughtful work and use an appropriate blend of closed and probing, open questions. They explain tasks and ideas clearly, structure lessons to ensure significant progress is made and offer additional help to pupils who are unsure. The climate of such lessons is rigorous and intellectually stimulating.

42. In a significant minority of lessons, however, there are weaknesses which hold back pupils' progress. Some lessons start slowly and continue at a leisurely pace. In a few lessons pupils' unnecessary chatter and silliness impede their own and others' progress. A more common weakness is that pupils are not expected to think, talk or write deeply enough, because issues are treated superficially and too casually. An increase of pace and challenge is needed in a significant minority of lessons to raise standards of attainment and progress further.

43. Lessons are nearly always well planned. In the best lessons teachers revise quickly what has been taught in previous lessons, explain carefully to pupils the sequence of new material, set sensible time limits on activities, and ensure that a review of the lesson is undertaken in the last few minutes. In science, for example, the best investigations are based on thorough preparation, well-structured experiments, penetrating questions and detailed reviewing of evidence. In design and technology the purpose and structure of a 20-lesson block of work was meticulously explained and was well understood by pupils. In a few lessons, in contrast, introductions are unclear, rushed or too long, the main part is lacklustre, and the significant points are not summarised clearly. A more common weakness in planning is that teachers provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to consolidate and test their understanding by applying their knowledge to unfamiliar topics.

44. Teachers use a satisfactory range of teaching methods. Teaching of the whole class is usually balanced well by a suitable amount of time being spent, where appropriate, investigating issues through work in pairs or small groups. Sometimes teachers use their particular skills to sharpen ideas – as, for example, by sketching and converting initial ideas into workable models in design and technology. It is rare, however, for pupils to be given experience of techniques such as brainstorming, of making rapid notes for class discussion or of making extended presentations. Too rarely are pupils required to express, justify or evaluate their ideas. This omission holds pupils back, especially those of higher attainment.

45. Except in a small number of classes where pupils readily lapse into chatting or coasting, lessons are well managed. Most classes are calm, purposeful and very orderly. Teachers' relationships with pupils are friendly, caring and encouraging. The liveliness and enthusiasm of much teaching sustains pupils' interest well. Pupils are, in the main, well supported. Although in a few classes the level of pointless talk is inadequately checked, teachers' control of classes nearly always has a friendly firmness.

46. Time is normally used well. Most lessons proceed at an appropriately brisk pace and cover a suitable amount of ground. In the best lessons time is often built in to the structure of lessons for rigorous debate or reflection. Teachers generally utilise a reasonable range of resources imaginatively as, for

example, in English and RE when judiciously using several short video excerpts to illustrate a topic or to stimulate discussion, or when using technical help in design and technology to assist in the checking of how well electronic circuits have been constructed.

47. Teachers' assessments in class and the marking of pupils' work are usually soundly done. In a significant minority of cases (as, for example, in pupils' sketchbooks in art) teachers' comments offer constructive guidance as to how work can be improved. The most skilled teaching rapidly identifies pupils' strengths and weaknesses. As they circulate round the class, for instance, such teachers rapidly pinpoint pupils' stages of development and fine-tune the next things to learn, or by frequent checking ensure that all pupils know exactly what they have to do to achieve higher standards.

48. Teaching is good overall throughout the school. It is satisfactory in English in Key Stage 3 and in mathematics and business education in Key Stage 4. In no subject is it very good overall, but nearly all subjects have at least some teaching that is very good. Almost a fifth of it is of this high quality in Years 9 and 10, and there is a significant amount in modern foreign languages and RE. Although a minority of parents feel that not enough homework is set, homework was generally set appropriately, both in volume and quality, during the inspection, to reinforce or extend what had been learnt in school. Pupils' planners are usually signed as checked, though rarely with comments by either teachers or parents.

The curriculum and assessment

49. The breadth and balance of the curriculum are good overall. These qualities help to ensure that all pupils have appropriate opportunities for personal and physical development and that they are suitably prepared for the next stage of education or employment. At Key Stage 3 the breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory. All subjects of the National Curriculum and RE are appropriately covered. All pupils study personal and social education (PSE) and two-fifths study a second modern foreign language. Drama is taught to all pupils in Year 7, but in Years 8 and 9 it is only taken by the one third of pupils who do not study a second modern foreign language. Latin is taught in Year 9 to high-attaining pupils.

50. At Key Stage 4 the breadth and balance of the curriculum are good. All pupils study the core subjects including Double Science, a full course in design and technology, information studies, PE, PSE, and social studies which includes citizenship, careers education and health education. An appropriate range of optional subjects is offered for GCSE examinations. General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) are offered in manufacturing and in leisure and tourism, although pupils following this option are unable to study art, expressive arts or music. In Year 11 an appropriate scheme of National Vocational Qualifications is provided for a small group of pupils for whom the full range of GCSE courses is unsuitable.

51. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The time allocation for GCSE information studies is, however, insufficient to cover the course in appropriate depth. At Key Stage 3 the time allocated for PE is low and timetabled in single lessons which are too short for the effective teaching of games. The provision for IT in Year 9 is inadequate to teach the course in sufficient depth, resulting in unsatisfactory overall progress in that year. The arrangements for teaching food technology at Key Stage 3 lead to poor coverage of subject content and result in slow progress. In each year pupils study a well-designed course for PSE. This course includes suitable provision for health and sex education.

52. The total teaching time each week is 23 hours 55 minutes. This is below the minimum time of 24 hours generally and the 25 hours at Key Stage 4 recommended by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The length of study leave allowed to pupils before they take their first written GCSE examinations is excessive, resulting in valuable opportunities for structured revision being missed; this is

currently being reviewed. During the period of the inspection appropriate homework was set and marked regularly.

53. All pupils have access to all subjects of the curriculum. The choice of options at Key Stage 4 is wide, but has the restriction that pupils can choose only one subject from art, drama or music. Pupils are taught in mixed-ability groups in Year 7 when they arrive at the school; setting is introduced in the Autumn term of that year for some subjects, including English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. These arrangements are effective. The match of work to the needs of pupils is good in art and modern foreign languages and is broadly satisfactory elsewhere; in geography and RE, however, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged on a regular basis. Sensible, alternative accreditation is provided in six subjects (including English, mathematics and science) for those pupils for whom GCSE examinations are not appropriate.

54. The procedures for curricular planning are satisfactory, but those for monitoring the impact of the curriculum are weak. Schemes of work are very good in RE, good in English, mathematics, science, art, history and music, and satisfactory elsewhere. Curricular links to ensure effective continuity with contributory primary schools have begun in English, mathematics and music, but in other subjects they are inadequate. All subjects have curricular links which are at least satisfactory with post-16 education; those in art, design and technology, GNVQ courses and music are good.

55. A very good range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. Regular out-of-school activities include an arts visit to Barcelona, geography fieldwork in Germany, an exchange visit with Tubingen, and a history visit to the World War 1 battlefields in France. There are regular visits to places and events in the local area, and a successful school camp is held for pupils in Year 9 in the Lake District. Subject clubs and a wide range of musical events are enhanced by quizzes and competitions linked to the House system. Many sporting activities take place, with the school being particularly successful in badminton and swimming competitions. Inter-house competitions enable three-quarters of pupils to take part in sport, and half are involved in inter-school events. There is a very strong commitment to these from about 30 members of staff.

56. There is very good provision for careers education and guidance. A good programme of careers education is included as part of the PSE programme, and this is taught effectively by a specialist careers teacher at Key Stage 4. This programme is regularly enhanced by visiting speakers and by a successful annual careers convention for pupils in Year 11. Good relationships exist with the careers service. They provide impartial guidance for pupils with greatest need and those with special educational needs in Year 10, and offer interviews to all pupils in Year 11. Pupils are well prepared for these interviews and over half the parents attend.

57. All pupils in Year 10 participate for two weeks in well-organised work experience. There is a good programme of preparation, in which pupils write a letter of application and complete a *curriculum vitae*. During the placement pupils complete a workbook and are visited by a member of staff. Follow-up work is appropriate. Staff ensure all pupils are familiar with the careers library. This is appropriately situated in the main library/resources area and is well maintained. Suitable information is available on computer, but the amount of information in booklet form is inadequate.

58. The school has a clearly written policy and satisfactory guidance on the assessment, marking, recording and reporting of pupils' work. Within subject departments the quality of day-to-day assessments of individual pupils' work is good overall. In some subjects particular aspects of assessment are good: in mathematics and science, for example, comprehensive systems of recording are used, and in music pupils receive objective evaluations of their work in almost every lesson.

59. In Key Stage 3, assessments of pupils' work relate satisfactorily to National Curriculum levels of

study. There is, however, insufficient consistency in assessment procedures across the whole curriculum. Assessment data for all pupils is beginning to be collated by computer, but, as the school recognises, there is a variety of departmental methods which do not coherently form a whole-school system. Although it is incomplete, the establishment of a central recording system goes some way to rectifying the inconsistency of assessment indicated in the previous inspection.

60. Insufficient use is made of data from primary schools, but pupils are assessed consistently in the school in Year 7 in order to place them in sets, particularly in the core subjects. Within departments, assessment is used satisfactorily to enable teachers to vary the pace of work for groups and individuals. The assessment of pupils with special educational needs is good. The use of a national commercial system of assessing pupils' attainment and progress is now well embedded in the school's practice.

61. At present, some departments write reports on pupils' attainments and progress with the help of computer-generated statements. These statements, which are included in the annual reports to parents, often lack precision and objectivity. In particular, information about pupils' progress is unsatisfactory. A significant minority of parents express dissatisfaction with the quality of this information.

62. A coherent grading system (A-G) is employed throughout the school to indicate pupils' level of attainment. These grades, which relate to anticipated achievements in external examinations at the end of Key Stage 4, are largely helpful to pupils, teachers and parents. The grades are used satisfactorily, albeit with some inconsistency of interpretation, in the newly adopted process of setting individual targets for pupils.

63. Records of achievement are completed in the pupils' final year in school. At earlier stages, records of achievement consist of summaries of pupils' attainments. Although planners give good, broad indications of pupils' overall academic and other achievements, the school does not have an effective system for retaining the cumulative evidence of these achievements as pupils move through the school.

Pupils with special educational needs

64. The quality of work achieved with pupils who have special educational needs is good overall and, on occasions, very good. The school has created a climate in which such pupils both feel secure and are regularly challenged to work to their full capabilities. This approach has contributed positively to the overall good ethos of the school. The high quality of the department's work is a strength of the school.

65. Pupils with special educational needs make always sound (and often good) progress. They assess their own work well. In an English group in Year 11, for example, they reviewed, with care and insight, their approach to the requirements of the course and the examination in literature. The small groups in Key Stage 3 who receive intensive support for specific reading difficulties (dyslexia) are able to take responsibility for practising and checking their own writing and spelling tasks.

66. Pupils respond well in class. They have positive attitudes and show good concentration. They enjoy the challenge of tasks that are well matched to their individual needs. They generally relate well to one another and to their teachers. They respond very well to individual attention and play a positive role in the social and pastoral life of the school.

67. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is generally good. Work is well planned, often with meticulous attention to individual pupils' learning requirements. Most of the materials used are either specially developed or adapted to pupils' needs, but care is taken to keep in step with the demands of subjects in the main school. Teachers have positive and sensitive relationships with pupils, but they also present them with appropriate challenges to extend their learning.

68. Links with specialist services and agencies outside the school are good. The coordinator of special educational needs (the SENCO) is energetic in attracting the greatest possible help for pupils from such external sources. He manages the department very effectively and is supported by a cohesive team who have developed a suitable range of specialist skills and knowledge. Assessments of pupils' needs are carefully carried out and regularly reviewed. Individual education plans (IEPs) are informative and well formulated and present suitable targets for the pupils concerned. They are circulated to all relevant staff, many of whom make effective use of them in providing for the pupils. Links with parents are strong and the quality of communications and educational reports is high.

69. The school has been generous in making provision for a wide range of special educational needs. The building has been well adapted to cater for pupils and adults who have physical or mobility difficulties. From this academic year, it has also taken responsibility for developing provision for visually impaired children, with additional resourcing from its local authority. The quality of this service, even at its current early stage of development, is good.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

70. The provision for these aspects of pupils' development is good overall. Opportunities for pupils' spiritual development, however, are limited, a weakness that was identified in the previous inspection.

71. The school promotes pupils' spiritual development satisfactorily. Its provision is mainly through RE, which is given appropriate emphasis in the curriculum. In this subject pupils are taught clearly about world faiths and are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs; this is achieved particularly through dramatisation and the serious discussion of religious matters. Pupils learn about the major faiths not only in the classroom, but also as a result of visiting places of worship such as York Minster and the Regent's Park Mosque.

72. In some assemblies pupils share their own experiences. In the Harvest celebration, for example, they think deeply about the problems of food resources experienced by people around the world. Most assemblies, however, are noticeably lacking in the provision of spiritual experiences for pupils. The spiritual dimension is included in a few lessons: in music, for instance, pupils listen to Handel's *Messiah* and in English they examine important issues of faith and traditions in *The Merchant of Venice*. The school's orderly and caring ethos reinforces in the pupils a sense of feeling and caring for others.

73. Provision for pupils' moral development is good. Expectations of acceptable behaviour and indications of what is right and wrong are made clear to pupils in most lessons and as they move around the school. Themes in assemblies and in PSE lessons include strong messages about bullying, racial abuse and the misuse of drugs and alcohol. The school's code of conduct is displayed in classrooms, along with an outline of an effective system of rewards and sanctions. Lessons in Year 9 include talks from representatives of bodies such as The Commission for Racial Equality and The Samaritans. Pupils raise money to help charities, including a local hospice which they also visit. In some lessons (as, for example, in history) pupils discuss and learn about racism and slavery, and in science they study the implications of genetic engineering. Physical education provides very good experiences of team work, respect for rules and the notion of fair play.

74. Pupils' social development is promoted well. In some lessons (as, for example, in English, in design and technology and in music) pupils learn by frequently working collaboratively with partners or in groups. Pupils enjoy positive social experiences through a very good range of extracurricular activities which include music ensembles, sports activities, quizzes and a reading competition. Many of these activities are promoted within the House system and are frequently organised and led by the pupils themselves. These activities give pupils a clear sense of loyalty. There is, additionally, a good range of

visits out of school. These include a science study trip to London, linguistic and cultural studies in Poland and Spain, and a school camp for pupils in Year 9.

75. Elements of citizenship and an experience of responsibility are promoted through a prefect system and by upper school pupils' working with younger pupils. The older pupils help them in lessons and attend form tutorials where they offer advice on using planners. Both older and younger pupils are also regularly involved in organising a Christmas party for senior citizens. The school council has been successful in the past in involving pupils in decision-making processes about lunchtime arrangements, the quality of toilet provision and the roles of prefects.

76. The school has a good variety of attractive areas and spaces where pupils meet outside lesson times. Many classrooms and some specialist areas remain open over lunchtime for both recreation and work. Litter is effectively dealt with. Pupils' personal welfare is, however, lowered by the poor condition and maintenance of toilets.

77. Pupils' cultural development is promoted satisfactorily. In the curriculum pupils learn about their own and other cultures. In music, for instance, pupils appreciate the connections between Western and Asian genres. Similarities and differences in cultural traditions are also studied in depth in art and RE. A good link has been established with the Darlington Arts Centre, and a good range of visits further afield enhances pupils' studies. These include visits to the city of York, a German exchange and a range of visits in connection with biology, geography and history. The school has occasional visitors from cultures which are different from the pupils' own, but, in general, opportunities for them to meet people from ethnic minorities are limited.

78. The school is far short of meeting the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. This remains a substantial gap, as it did at the time of the last inspection.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

79. The school's arrangements for providing support, advice and guidance for pupils are good. The system of four Houses, with form tutors accompanying pupils as they go through the school from Year 7, produces a strong sense of allegiance and cohesion for pupils. It also encourages a wide range of recreational and sporting activities within and between the houses. The heads of houses and their deputies provide strong and effective leadership and work hard to ensure consistency of practice across the houses. On occasions, however, the communication and implementation of policies are handled in unhelpfully different ways in the four houses.

80. Guidance of pupils towards courses and programmes of study is soundly planned and effectively applied. The behaviour and attendance of individual pupils are carefully monitored. The supervision of pupils' academic progress, however, is not carried out to a consistent and widely understood model, with the result that their progress cannot be securely tracked over Years 7-11.

81. Systems for promoting good behaviour are sound. Rewards and sanctions are clear and sensibly applied. Evidence of bullying is limited, but the school works effectively to eliminate its effects when it is detected. Arrangements for Child Protection within the school are good and well known to all staff.

82. Provision to secure pupils' health, safety and wellbeing is generally good. Nursing and first-aid facilities are effective and readily accessible to pupils. Outside agencies are used to provide support and counselling for individual pupils, where staff feel that more specialised help is required. Overall, pupils feel secure in the school and valued by staff.

83. Assessments of risk to pupils' health and safety are not uniformly carried out and the action plan arising from a recent safety audit of the school has not been systematically implemented. Some of the pupils' toilets are not kept in good condition. Programmes of personal, social and health education, including teaching about sex and drugs, are appropriate and well prepared. They are taught by all form tutors: the quality of teaching is sound overall, but has significant variations. This teaching is not adequately monitored and reviewed.

Partnership with parents and the community

84. The school's prospectus, the New Entrants' handbook and the options booklet for Key Stage 4 are clear and informative. These give appropriate outlines of courses of study in each subject. Subject departments occasionally give full details to pupils within school - as, for example, in mathematics where a large wall display itemises the programme of study. Generally, however, insufficient details of courses of study are readily available to parents. Pupils' planners are generally well used, liked by pupils, and a good method of communication with home. Whilst the planners are regularly signed by parents and staff, there is little evidence in them of constructive comments from either teachers or parents. Annual reports to parents are generally carefully compiled, but do not always carry specific or fully comparable information about attainment, rates of progress or grades. About a fifth of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated dissatisfaction with the amount of information available to them about the curriculum or their children's progress.

85. Parents' evenings are well attended and the school is readily available for additional discussion about pupils' personal or academic progress. The school issues regular newsletters of good quality. Its own web-site provides a good range of information, including the school prospectus, staff details, examination results and newsletters. This facility is being expanded to be an increasingly useful link with parents and the community.

86. The governing body's annual report and meeting with parents comply with legal requirements and provide an appropriate range of information about the school and its activities. No parents work voluntarily in lessons, but there is a small group who regularly provide assistance for extracurricular sporting activities. There is good support from parents in other areas such as careers education: over 60 per cent of work experience placements are arranged by parents for their children.

87. The school has limited links with its local community. Its good drama and music facilities have been used in the past for public productions or events which were well supported by parents and the community. A reasonable range of arts performances is still, however, sustained. Links with the main contributory primary schools are sound on pastoral matters, but are weak on academic aspects, so lessening curricular continuity for individual pupils.

88. The school's contacts with industry are at the same modest level as they were at the time of the last inspection. Together with the Education Business Partnership the school does, however, continue to run a successful work experience scheme. It also holds an annual careers convention which attracts many exhibitors.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

89. Leadership at all levels of the school is generally effective, although the monitoring of the impact of

policies across the school is not adequate. The governing body is a cohesive and widely representative group which has provided good support for the school's development. It tackles its business with energy and dedication, and has recently started to frame a set of strategic objectives for the school. It does not, however, have any clear method of assessing the effectiveness of the school's performance and of the implementation of its policies.

90. The headteacher is highly experienced. He has steered the school successfully through periods of significant change. He provides strong continuity and sense of purpose at the centre, whilst affording staff considerable scope for exercising their initiative and professional judgement. The senior management team does not, however, adequately coordinate the effects of these separate initiatives. This limits the school's effectiveness in addressing the important priorities it now faces, such as the development of a school-wide information system; the systematic monitoring of teaching and learning; the attainment of improved targets for pupils' performance; and the clear delineation of staff accountability for action.

91. The quality of leadership shown by staff with responsibilities for subjects and pastoral teams is always at least sound and generally good. The pattern of meetings and consultations is well suited to the school's needs. On occasions, however, lines of communication and responsibility are confused. The oversight of the performance of faculties and subject areas is insufficiently rigorous and regular. Systems for monitoring and evaluating teaching and curricular provision across the school are limited. There is no regular or consistent approach to the reviewing of the quality of teaching and of the impact of the curriculum on pupils' performance.

92. The school has formulated a clear and consistent statement of its aims, values and goals. To a large extent, these aspirations are faithfully and successfully reflected in the daily life of the school. The school's developmental planning is sound but, since it is limited to a single year, does not facilitate the framing of a more strategic vision of the school's future.

93. The overall ethos of the school is good. It is based on the encouragement of high standards, the fostering of good relationships and the rights of all pupils to have access to a rich curriculum. The school's success in extending these opportunities to pupils with a wide range of special educational needs has contributed significantly to this positive climate across the whole school community.

94. The school does not, however, comply with statutory requirements in three areas. It does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, a weakness identified at the last inspection; assessments of risk to health and safety are not carried out or followed up systematically across all areas of the school; and arrangements for the appraisal of teachers do not satisfy regulations.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

95. The school has sufficient, appropriately qualified teachers to cover the subjects it teaches, except for its planned expansion of GNVQ courses. There is a good match between teachers' initial qualifications and the subjects taught. Although there are equal numbers of men and women on the staff, men greatly outnumber women in senior posts.

96. The deployment of teachers is fair and most teach across the full range of pupils' ages and abilities. The proportion of time spent by teachers in lessons is about average. Whilst the overall size of classes is average, there are wide variations; in some of the larger classes teaching methods are limited, because pupils cannot move about easily.

97. Overall, the number of ancillary staff is slightly below average for the size of the school. Although there is a technician for IT, there is a shortage in the amount of technical help in science and in design and technology. The learning support assistants make an effective contribution to the

education of pupils with special educational needs through close collaboration with subject teachers. The school has two modern foreign language assistants who are efficiently used. Whilst the number of administrative staff is below average, their contribution is valued by teachers.

98. Staff development is effectively organised by the senior staff, who work out the priorities and link them to the school's Improvement Plan. Finance is efficiently allocated to these priorities and to initiatives determined by individual departments and teachers. The formal appraisal of teachers does not conform to the national pattern, thereby putting the school in breach of statutory requirements. The informal appraisal undertaken on a faculty basis is, however, used to provide targets for further training. Newly qualified teachers are very well supported by the school within a comprehensive programme of meetings and classroom observation. The programme is well managed to provide a firm basis for career development.

99. The school's very attractive and well-maintained site, including an indoor sports complex, provides good facilities for pupils. Additional specialist sports facilities are available off site. The buildings are in a satisfactory state of decorative order, virtually free of graffiti, and experience only a small amount of litter - all improvements since the last inspection.

100. Only about half the subjects are taught in rooms grouped together. This lack of grouping does not encourage the efficient use of resources, displays and storage or provide departmental cohesion. One art room, for example, is badly located in a workshop for resistant materials, is cluttered with redundant equipment, and is noisy and draughty. Displays are well used around the school for information and to stimulate pupils' thinking. The small size of some classrooms, especially when occupied by classes of over 30 pupils, limits the range and flexibility of teaching.

101. The school has a good library/resources centre and new practice rooms for music. Facilities for disabled pupils are good: ramps and a lift provide access to most areas of the school. In addition a new suite has been provided for teaching pupils with visual impairment. The decoration and facilities in toilets are inadequate. This is a concern of some parents, many pupils and the school's staff.

102. Spending on learning resources is average for a school of this size and type, although there has been a decrease in the last year. The provision of resources is good overall, and the deficiencies identified in the last inspection report have been remedied. The provision of resources in departments is good in modern foreign languages, geography and history, and satisfactory elsewhere. Equipment in science is now sufficient, although some of it is very old. The resources for pupils with special educational needs are good.

103. The provision of centrally available IT is good. The ratio of computers to pupils is slightly below than average, but the equipment has been upgraded to provide nearly a hundred good quality, industry-standard machines for pupils' use. Departmental provision of IT is variable. It is good for pupils with special educational needs, and there are small numbers of machines in science, design and technology, and humanities. Provision within other subjects is poor.

104. The library/resources centre is pleasant and welcoming. The stock of reference books is adequate. The resources include ten computers with access to the Internet, a stock of CD-ROMs, nearly three hundred videos, and two quality daily newspapers. In addition to the reference books there is a good stock of files of booklets and newspaper cuttings. A separate reading room has an adequate stock of fiction books and some reading books on non-fiction topics. Books for pupils with special educational needs are easily identifiable by pupils. The reading room also has a small number of readers for modern foreign languages and books relating to cultures other than that of the majority of pupils in the school.

105. The school makes very good use of off-site resources. Local sports facilities are used frequently

and effectively, and there are residential visits abroad and in this country, exchange visits to Europe, and fieldwork in geography and history .

The efficiency of the school

106. The school has moved from a small deficit in 1997-1998 to a small surplus in the present financial year. This reflects prudent financial management and careful decisions about spending. The level of funding is slightly below average for the type and size of school.

107. The governing body is well informed about patterns of spending and monitors the school's spending closely through its finance committee. Short-term financial planning is sound. The school's action plan is, however, only costed in broad terms and contains little detailed long-term planning. The system for devolving funds to departments is seen by staff as fair. There is a development fund from which departments can receive extra money, if their bids are approved by the headteacher and finance committee. Spending by heads of departments is carefully monitored.

108. The teaching staff is used effectively and the majority of lessons are taught by subject specialists. Many of the teachers are young and, as a result, the spending on teaching staff is lower than average. The ratio of pupils to teachers and the time teachers spend in lessons are average. The three-quarters of the budget spent on teachers is used efficiently. The total teaching time is, however, below that recommended nationally. Time is used well in the main and lessons start promptly. The administrative staff contributes well to the efficient running of the school.

109. The accommodation is, in the main, used well, but the teaching of several subjects in rooms in different parts of the site creates some inefficiencies in the use of resources. There is careful monitoring of the spending on energy, but the control system for the heating system is old and is neither efficient nor very effective. The use of resources for learning is mostly good. The library/resources centre and the separate reading room are used well.

110. The control of the school's finances is sound. The main issues raised in the last report of July 1999 from the external auditor have been, or are being, dealt with. The school achieves above average academic success and provides its pupils with a good education on a funding per pupil which is just below the national average. It shows an awareness of the need to spend carefully and provides good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

111. Pupils' standard of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with that found nationally. In National Curriculum tests in 1998 the percentage of pupils reaching at least level 5 was close to the national average, and the percentage reaching at least level 6 was below average. The average points score of boys was marginally above the national average for boys, whereas that of girls was below the national average for girls. When compared with the performance of pupils from schools with a similar proportion of free school meals, results were above average. Results in national tests in 1999 were lower than those of 1998.

The general standard of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is in line with the national average. In GCSE for English language in 1998 the percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C was above the national average. Girls achieve more than boys, although the performance of boys was well above the national average for boys, whilst that of girls was above the national average for girls.

113. Results in GCSE for English literature were significantly above the national average, with boys again doing better than girls when compared with their respective averages. In 1999 the performance in English language was almost the same as that in 1998, but in English literature results were below the high standards of 1998. Comparison with some other data and subjects indicates that standards of attainment should be higher.

114. The overall quality of speaking and listening is slightly above average. The great majority of pupils listen attentively. They work together productively in small groups. In class most pupils use standard English by the end of Key Stage 3. High-attaining pupils at both key stages are articulate and fluent in their speech. Pupils in Year 11, for example, sustained extended dialogue during a role-play exercise. Almost all pupils answer questions clearly. They are courteous and confident when talking to adults.

115. Attainment in reading is in line with that found nationally. The general standard of reading comprehension throughout the school is average and enables pupils to enjoy a wide range of literature. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils benefit from regular timetabled use of the recently refurbished reading room. A significant number of pupils in Years 7 and 8 who feel the need for help with their reading benefit greatly from paired work with senior pupils. Throughout the school most pupils study a wide range of important and stimulating texts and, by the end of Key Stage 4, make detailed critical analyses of major works of literature. One group of high-attaining pupils in Year 11, for example, showed great sensitivity and maturity in their study of racism in Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*.

116. Written work is average overall. It is, in the main, neatly presented throughout both key stages. Most pupils draft their work effectively, but a minority (and not always low-attaining pupils) are not thorough enough in checking details. At the end of Key Stage 4 high-attaining pupils write for different purposes and readerships at a standard consistently above average. Their writing is carefully planned, skilfully crafted, fluently expressed and technically accurate in grammar, spelling and punctuation. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils write lively and attractive poetry, some of which is on display. For example, pupils in Year 8 wrote, with great enjoyment, imaginative and humorous recipes for witches' brews, based on those in *Macbeth*.

117. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3. Their overall level of literacy on entry to the

school is usually close to the national average, but occasionally well above average. Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 are generally in line with the national average, demonstrating that steady progress has been maintained. In Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress and in recent years results in the GCSE have been above the national average. Pupils in Year 7 show rapid improvement in the confidence of their oral work as a result of lessons in drama. At the end of Key Stage 3, through regular practice, pupils work effectively in small groups. The standard of pupils' response to literature improves rapidly throughout both key stages as they study texts of increasing complexity.

118. The great majority of pupils throughout the school are well motivated and eager to learn. They sustain concentration well and work conscientiously. Relationships are almost always mutually respectful. A very small minority of pupils, from all levels of attainment, do not persevere with tasks and lack thoroughness in detail. In many classes there is a conscious enjoyment in learning and striving for high standards. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, especially in their work in media studies, take important and responsible decisions when planning their projects and assignments.

119. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is never less than satisfactory and is good, or even better, in almost half the lessons. At Key Stage 4 teaching is good, and sometimes better, in almost all lessons, and is always at least satisfactory. The quality of teaching in media studies is good. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is good. They plan and prepare lessons carefully. Tasks are clearly explained and precise targets set. In the great majority of lessons there are high expectations of behaviour and achievement. Very occasionally pupils are not constrained to keep quiet when teachers are talking or to work silently when told to do so. The range of teaching approaches is sometimes too limited, but, in general, the pace of lessons is good. Pupils with special educational needs are taught with great sensitivity and care. Work set for them is carefully matched to their individual levels of attainment. The overall quality of marking is good. Some assessment is outstandingly detailed and diagnostic, and is linked to clear, individual setting of targets for each pupil.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Departmental documentation is thorough and helpful. Drama and media studies are taught within the faculty of English, thus providing added breadth to the curriculum. Drama is taught to all pupils in Year 7 but, in later years, because of constraining options, many pupils (especially high-attaining ones) do not have the opportunity to study the subject. At Key Stage 4 some pupils take drama as an element in the performing arts examination course at GCSE. Media studies forms a popular option at the end of Key Stage 3: the standard of attainment in it is above that normally found.

121. An important, recent initiative identifies suitable ways of developing writing across the curriculum. Some schemes of work include elements of IT, but it is not an integral part of work in the classroom. Many teaching rooms are cramped for space when used for large classes, so limiting the range of teaching approaches. The dispersed siting of classrooms for the subject is inconvenient and inefficient, and is worse than in many schools. The good ethos of the department matches closely that of the school. The faculty is efficiently and skilfully managed.

122. In all subjects across the curriculum pupils listen attentively. The high importance given to spoken communication noted in the last report is not now evident. In a few subjects pupils' speech is not clear and fluent. Pupils have too little opportunity to learn through rigorous discussion. Only rarely are pupils encouraged to develop a point of view and to justify opinions under questioning. The majority of pupils are more confident and articulate than in many schools, but this strength in oral work is not fully exploited throughout most areas of the curriculum.

123. The reading comprehension of the majority of pupils is adequate for them to understand their textbooks and other materials. In subjects such as history pupils are encouraged to read aloud. The new reading room is intensively used to widen pupils' personal reading of fiction and a new small section has

been made for books in modern foreign languages. The library/resources centre is widely used by departments for research and extension of knowledge.

124. The overall quality of presentation and handwriting is good, although there are marked variations between departments. There is good written work in geography and history, but in science too much writing is straight copying. Although some pupils write careful notes, there is little evidence that they have been trained, within subjects, to develop this essential skill. The recent initiative in writing across the curriculum makes a valuable contribution to raising an awareness of language use across faculties and subjects.

Mathematics

125. The proportion of pupils who achieved the standard expected of 14 year olds in the 1998 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was above the national average. The proportion achieving the higher levels was well above the national average. Based upon the average level achieved by all pupils, the school's results were well above average, and were very high when compared with schools having a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. The results during recent years have remained well above national averages; boys' average attainment during this period has been slightly above that of the girls. Results for 1999 were as high as those of the previous year.

126. The proportion of pupils who achieved grades A*-C in the GCSE examinations in 1998 was above average. Few pupils achieved the highest grades compared with the previous year. The proportion of pupils who achieved a pass grade was also above the national average. Boys' attainments were better than those of the girls. The results over recent years have fallen steadily, but each year they have remained above the national average. Results for 1999 were below those of 1998.

127. Pupils in Year 7 get off to a good start by entering a well-structured sequence of modules at points suitable to their attainment. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs benefit from being in very small groups and make good progress, for example, in their work on number and geometry. On occasions they use computers effectively to enhance their learning. Pupils of average attainment review and consolidate their skills and knowledge in an appropriate range of mathematics and make satisfactory progress in, for example, performing suitable calculations. Occasionally they use interesting alternative ways of calculating, such as the Gelosia method of long multiplication; this enabled a class in Year 7 to gain secure understanding of the process. Progress is generally good in the early stages of learning algebra and in geometry and data-handling. High-attaining pupils make good progress in, for example, solving linear equations and evaluating algebraic expressions to a level above that normally expected at the beginning of Year 7.

128. Pupils in Year 8 make sound, and often good, progress overall. The majority of them learn effective methods of calculation and solve everyday problems by using their knowledge of measurements in metric units and in digital time of day. They gain confidence and accuracy in manipulating algebraic expressions and solving equations to an appropriate level. Progress in geometry and in handling data is equally sound. High-attaining pupils make good progress in probability and data-handling in particular. For example, to test their hypothesis that "taller people wear larger shoes", they collected appropriate data and constructed scatter graphs to justify the correlation between the variables. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs continue to benefit from being in a small group. They make good progress in a similar range of work, but not to the same depth.

129. By the end of Key Stage 3, the standard of work of a larger than average proportion of pupils matches the attainments prescribed by the National Curriculum, and a significant proportion reach higher levels of attainment. For example, a class of high-attaining pupils in Year 9 used sophisticated notation with which to express algebraically the general terms of sequences of numbers. They went on to include

these ideas in spreadsheets, using computers, to a level above that normally expected of 14 year olds. In response to thorough and systematic teaching, the progress of pupils in Year 9 is good overall and is broadly uniform across the National Curriculum programmes of study. For instance, the small group of pupils with special educational needs made secure progress during a lesson in geometry. They plotted the coordinates of the vertices of a shape which they proceeded to transform by translation and enlargement, achieving a standard of work expected of 14 year olds. Pupils of above-average attainment, on the other hand, lacked the basic skills of manipulating fractions. In response to effective teaching at a very good pace, they quickly acquired the skills to multiply and divide fractions. Throughout Years 7-9 pupils generally lack the ready recall of number facts and are not confident in mental methods of calculation. This frequently impedes their progress.

130. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment is average overall. It could be higher. Those in the top sets achieve high standards in, for example, algebra, trigonometry and probability. They apply this knowledge very competently to solve complex problems involving concepts such as bearings, speed and distance in the navigation of ships. They also learn quite sophisticated techniques to find the general term of a sequence of numbers using the method of differences. Lower-attaining pupils work steadily through a broadly based programme towards the foundation tier at GCSE. They make satisfactory, but unhurried, progress through this scheme. Pupils whose attainment is average generally achieve an appropriate standard in the prescribed skills of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and data-handling. Many pupils practise these skills with high degrees of accuracy and make sound progress overall. They lack, however, the confidence, urgency and determination to make better progress and gain firmer understanding, in order to use their knowledge appropriately in unfamiliar situations. Consequently their attainment in GCSE examinations is below the level they demonstrate in class.

131. Pupils' progress in Year 10 is satisfactory. It, too, could be better. On occasions the progress of top sets is impeded by a lack of understanding of basic numeracy. For example, the pupils in one such class were studying graphs of a range of functions, including inverse functions. The progress of many of them towards understanding the abstract concept of asymptote was lost through their inability to divide readily by a fraction. In other sets progress is sometimes lethargic, because pupils are required to practise skills for far too long during lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress in a range of mathematics by using practical methods to find, for example, the volume of a cuboid.

132. Pupils' response to the teaching they receive is, overall, good. Many respond positively to the clear expectations that they will present their work neatly and logically, using mathematical symbols and terminology correctly. On those occasions when the teaching lacks sufficient pace, challenge or demand, however, pupils' concentration slips and progress becomes unsatisfactory. For example, a class of pupils in Year 10 worked hard for much of the lesson in which they studied basic features of the equations of straight-line graphs. Their attention dwindled during the latter stages of the lesson, however, through lack of stimulus and challenge.

133. Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning the subject. They are willing to answer questions and work hard at the tasks set. They often show good levels of concentration. Only a few, however, ask questions and actively seek to clarify their understanding during whole-class discussions. Behaviour is good and pupils are willing workers. They form constructive relationships with their peers and their teachers, and enjoy humour. Pupils frequently help one another to clarify misunderstandings.

134. The quality of teaching is competent. It is mainly good at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 it is broadly satisfactory or good in about equal proportions. It could be better. Teachers are well qualified and their good subject knowledge is evident in the quality of explanations and in their planning and expectations of what pupils can do. They build current work well on that done earlier. Lesson objectives are clear and lessons usually include a suitable range of activities. Expectations of what pupils will learn are well matched to National Curriculum attainment targets. Teachers' expectations of how pupils will learn,

however, are too limited in many lessons.

135. Methods of teaching include many demonstrations of mathematical skills and techniques, clearly explained. Too often, however, such teaching does not sufficiently invite pupils to participate actively in discussion as a means of learning. Teachers' questioning does not push pupils sufficiently to think things through for themselves and to articulate their ideas, in order to achieve firmer understanding. For example, too little is done to enable pupils to learn effectively through discussion of their methods of mental calculation or to explain the reasoning behind the answers they offer. Skills and routines are practised conscientiously, but at times this continues for too long and such lessons lack the injection of stimulation, such as a short lively discussion, to revive pupils' motivation and move them on to the next stage of learning. Consequently, the pace of lessons is frequently a little slow in upper sets. Such strategies were used effectively during a lesson for pupils in Year 9, when they consolidated their understanding of manipulation of fractions.

136. Practical work is used effectively to promote learning, especially with low attainers. Occasional and effective use is made of IT to enhance pupils' learning. Solving mathematical problems in everyday situations is well taught and good opportunities are provided for short, and extended, mathematical investigations that require pupils to make generalisations and express them algebraically.

137. In many lessons the nature of the work and pupils' motivation lead to good behaviour. High quality relationships between teachers and their pupils provide a good climate for learning. Where necessary, pupils' behaviour is managed very competently by the teachers using effective strategies which avoid outright confrontation. During lessons teachers make good ongoing assessment of pupils' understanding and many errors are effectively followed up by discussion with individual pupils. Formal written assessments are made regularly and are used effectively to monitor pupils' progress. Marking is regular and helpful, and encouraging comments are frequently added. Attainment is recorded inconsistently, however, and progress is not indicated in a sufficiently helpful form. Homework is set regularly and is generally appropriate; it is used largely to consolidate learning. The subject is very well organised and the teaching staff have the potential to make the necessary improvements.

138. Pupils' general standards of numeracy are mostly adequate to support their work in other subjects effectively. In science, for example, pupils manipulate formulae and solve equations with reasonable confidence. They calculate with reasonable accuracy in both science and geography, and use appropriate methods to represent data graphically. Too many pupils, however, have weaknesses in the interpretation of graphs. In design and technology pupils apply their good skills of estimation and measuring effectively. Pupils use calculators well for appropriate purposes, but often rely too heavily upon them to perform trivial calculations which should be done mentally. This is partly because mental arithmetic is not taught frequently and systematically, particularly during pupils' early years in the school.

Science

139. The overall attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. Their performance in the National Curriculum test in Year 9 at the significant levels 5+ and 6+ was well above the national average in 1998, the latest year for which full national comparisons can be made. Results of the test taken in 1999 showed a sharp fall in the proportion of pupils achieving these levels. Over the period 1996-1998 pupils' attainment remained level, was well above the national average and very high when compared with those schools having a similar intake of pupils.

140. Although there is little difference in the performance of boys and girls by the end of this key stage, boys have usually done slightly better than girls. Pupils have a sound knowledge of basic scientific ideas such as particles, photosynthesis, chemical reactions and food chains, as well as the importance of fair testing in investigations. They present their work neatly and take care in drawing diagrams.

141. At the end of Key Stage 4 overall attainment is above average. Although the majority of pupils study Double Science in the GCSE examination, a significant number of high-attainers took the three separate sciences in 1998 and 1999. In the 1999 Double Science examination about half the cohort gained grades A*-C. The proportion was slightly lower in 1998, when the performance was average. When pupils' achievement in the separate sciences at grades A*-C is included in the analysis, pupils did better than the national average for 1998. Over the four years 1995-99, performance in GCSE examinations has been above the national average.

142. High-attaining pupils in particular have a sound grasp of scientific ideas such as dissolving, the structure of the atom, the importance of bacteria to human beings and of enzymes to digestion, the difference between mass and weight, and the formation of the universe and the Earth's place in it. All pupils appreciate the value of safe working practices and evaluate investigations confidently. They use mathematics appropriately to gain a deeper insight into many of the concepts.

143. Over Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress and learn a wide range of new ideas. High-attaining pupils learn these ideas rapidly; average and low attainers do so more slowly. Pupils refine their ideas about a fair test and learn the factors affecting cooling, the difference between physical and chemical changes, and the importance of photosynthesis to life. Both boys and girls progress equally well, whilst those with special educational needs make good progress through sensitive support.

144. Over Key Stage 4, pupils maintain good progress. They learn increasingly complex ideas such as the particle theory of matter and its application to conduction and solutions, the importance of carbon dioxide to life, the types and structure of cells, the identification of enzymes and a wide range of chemical reactions. Pupils with special educational needs learn ideas at an appropriate level, aided by the close collaboration between science and special needs teachers and assistants.

145. Most pupils in Key Stage 3 show interest in what they are doing and carry out experiments with enthusiasm. Those in Year 7 are excited by the new approach to the subject. Most concentrate throughout lessons, but pupils with special educational needs find the double periods too long. When the pace of lessons slackens, pupils begin to chatter about other things. Pupils behave well in most cases and always listen to the teacher when told to. They look after scientific apparatus carefully and cause few breakages. Pupils usually move around the laboratories sensibly, but in some lessons a minority of boys are silly and pose risks to themselves and others. In practical sessions, pupils cooperate well and discuss their work seriously.

146. Over Key Stage 4, most pupils maintain interest in the subject, although a minority easily become disengaged, particularly in the lower sets in Year 11. On the other hand, pupils with special educational needs show curiosity when topics are suitably designed. Pupils generally behave sensibly. In practical sessions they cooperate well and discuss their work seriously. In both key stages, when given the opportunity, pupils work steadily on their own in completing investigations.

147. The quality of teaching is good overall - satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. All lessons are well planned, but in some the learning objectives are not clear, nor are they shared with the pupils, with the result that pupils lose interest in the topic. Although teachers expect pupils to work hard throughout lessons, the challenge in some of those in Key Stage 3 is too low to engage the intellect of higher-attainers. Generally the questioning of pupils is insufficiently probing to elicit clearly what they know, because teachers are too often content with simple responses which they seldom follow up. There is little in-depth discussion, even with high-attaining pupils, to gain a coherent picture of a topic.

148. Teachers use a wide range of approaches such as practicals and investigations, but seldom videos, demonstrations or computers. The discipline in lessons is generally at least satisfactory and often good,

firm and friendly. In a few lessons, however, it is too relaxed, so that the pace of learning slackens and the double period is not fully used. Homework is set regularly and marked thoroughly, with encouraging comments and grades which conform to departmental policy. It is, however, seldom used to launch new lessons.

149. Schemes of work are clearly presented. They do not, however, state learning objectives for each section, nor make any reference to the use of IT. Pupils in the lowest sets now study for the Certificate of Achievement, which is more suited to their needs. The assessment of pupils' performance is thorough. The results are used mainly for setting, however, rather than for tracking individual pupils' performances.

150. The department is generally well managed, with clear policies and direction. It fosters good relationships and aims towards the highest standards for the pupils. The deficiencies noted above, however, require improvement. The well-qualified teachers are competently supported by reliable technicians, who are under severe pressure owing to the dispersed nature of the accommodation. The condition of the laboratories varies from worn to attractive; one is particularly small and hinders practical work with a large group of pupils. Resources are well used, although at present the use of computers is restricted by their shortage in the department and difficulty of access to the main provision. There is sufficient equipment for the courses provided. The department has a shortage of textbooks, however, and this limits study at home.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

151 Over the 1996-1998 period GCSE results were at least above (sometimes well above) the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C. The trend of these results has strongly and consistently risen over 1996-1999. The proportion of grades A*-G obtained was in line with the national average in 1996, but slightly below it in 1997 and 1998. The highest proportions of grades A*-C and A*-G were achieved in 1999. Girls perform better than boys, although boys' results have improved significantly when compared with the national averages for boys. At the end of Key Stage 3 the majority of pupils at least reach, and often exceed, the level expected nationally.

152. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment in applying art techniques, and generally, is above average, but their knowledge and understanding of artists' styles is average. In Year 9 the majority of pupils achieve standards which are above average in designing and making in two and three dimensions when, for example, basing their work on Cubist and African art. The majority of pupils are articulate in discussion. Written work is generally of a good standard. Lower-attaining pupils have average skills, but their knowledge and understanding about the subject are below average.

153. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment in applying art techniques and their general level of attainment are above average. Higher-attaining pupils show well above average levels of research and experimentation in sketchbooks. They display a very clear understanding of what they wish to achieve in current projects. These include an exciting range of approaches and choice of materials, as for example, in using designs based on angels and architectural forms.

154. The progress of the majority of pupils in Key Stage 3 in practical activities is good. They make satisfactory progress in theoretical activities. Those of higher attainment make good progress in all areas of study. Middle-attaining pupils make good progress in acquiring appropriate skills and satisfactory progress in knowledge and understanding about the subject. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 8 make unsatisfactory progress: large numbers in small art rooms do not help these pupils to overcome their difficulties. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Those with visual or

physical disabilities are well supported by an additional adult presence in class. A visit to Barcelona provides good enrichment opportunities for pupils in Year 9.

155. Progress in Key Stage 4 is good overall and often very good. During the inspection it was not possible to observe lessons in Year 11, although well-attended extracurricular activities were observed and studied, together with a representative sample of pupils' work. Whilst numbers studying for GCSE are small, pupils' motivation to succeed is high. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make good progress in acquiring artistic skills, as they gain confidence in understanding and applying art-related ideas. Progress in this key stage is well supported by visits to the Darlington Arts Centre, as well as access to artists in residence.

156. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. The majority of pupils are interested in the tasks set and their behaviour is good. A small minority (mainly boys) in Year 8 are disruptive.

157. The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory, and often good; it was very good in a fifth of the lessons seen. The best teaching is at the end of Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4, where lower numbers also make it more possible for teachers to use a wider range of methods, including group activities. Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable. They are enthusiastic and committed to achieving high standards. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural needs are well developed through the subject.

158. The accommodation available to the department has been much improved, although rooms are not grouped together, and cramped working conditions in two rooms restrict pupils' progress, particularly in Year 8. The heating system in one room is very noisy and levels of dust are a cause for concern. Statutory requirements are otherwise met, but IT is not used. The subject is very well led by a head of department who has worked hard to ensure better working conditions for staff and pupils, and has raised standards in public examinations. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection, although class sizes are still too high in Key Stage 3 and computers are not yet installed in art areas. Staff await training in the use and application of computers for the subject.

Design and technology

159. At the end of Key Stage 3 the attainment of pupils is in line with the national average. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 indicate that the majority of pupils achieve Level 5+, the basic standard expected for their age. Girls' results were higher than boys', and by an increased margin, in 1999 over 1998. In 1997, results were also in line with national averages, but with little difference in girls' and boys' achievement. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils have a sound understanding of designing and have competent practical skills. They are familiar with computer-aided design and control as seen, for example, in a lesson in Year 9 when pupils engraved a clock face. They produce detailed plans to ensure accuracy and make products with reasonable accuracy and quality. They have inadequate experience in food in the small amount of time scheduled and pupils of average or lower attainment struggle to meet the demands of the GCSE course in Key Stage 4.

160. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is above average overall. Girls achieve better than boys in most courses. The GCSE results in 1999 were above the national average figures for 1998 in the combined GCSE design and technology/business studies course. In 1997 and in 1998, GCSE results were above average and girls' results were better than boys'. Results in 1999 in the full GCSE courses were above the national average figures for 1998 in electronics products and textiles, average in graphic products and resistant materials, but below average in food technology. Girls' results have been consistently above average in recent years, although boys attain higher levels in this school than they often do nationally. Standards overall have remained steady since the last inspection - in line with national expectations at Key Stage 3 and above average at Key Stage 4.

161. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4. On entry in Year 7, pupils have shallow experience in the subject, but by the end of Year 9 the majority work at the level that is expected for their age. They generally make good progress in learning design skills and in developing their knowledge of suitable materials and construction processes in a broad range of work that is well matched to their abilities. For example, they engage in research, drawing designs, computer-aided design, computer-aided manufacture, electronics, control, plastics, food and textiles technology.

162. In Key Stage 4 the level of challenge increases and pupils make satisfactory progress, working independently, to manage more complex design tasks. They benefit from the school's good links to local industry and are able to explore industrial practices to develop their products. They develop soundly their ability to judge technical, economic, aesthetic, social and moral issues in designing and manufacturing. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support and generally make good progress at both key stages.

163. Pupils behave well in lessons in all years. Boys and girls have good attitudes to work, listen carefully and respond well to teachers. They watch closely to learn new techniques and persevere to master them. They complete written work with care, take pride in their achievements and appreciate the ideas and good standards of others, as seen, for example, in a lesson when pupils were examining displays of their work. They share working areas considerately and use tools and equipment responsibly. High-attaining pupils work independently with good levels of interest and confidence. They review work appropriately to improve their standards. Careful marking helps them to judge their progress or see how to improve their work. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, respond positively to the good individual support that teachers give them in lessons.

164. Teaching is always at least satisfactory, and frequently good, at both key stages. Teachers have a thorough understanding of their specialist subjects and plan work carefully to develop pupils' capabilities. Lessons have clear aims, incorporate key assessment criteria and are well paced to make effective use of the lesson-time available. In the best lessons teachers use a wide range of approaches to good effect to encourage pupils to think imaginatively and independently, to investigate and to experiment. In an electronics lesson, for example, these methods included clear explanation, demonstrations, discussions and practical activities (using IT) that encouraged rigour in decision-making. Although the range and match of work to pupils' attainments has improved since the last inspection, planning does not give pupils sufficient continuity of experience in Key Stage 3.

Statutory requirements are met. Although time-tabling constraints in Key Stage 4 hinder teaching and set limits on the standards that pupils can achieve, the curriculum is broad and reasonably balanced, offering a good choice of GCSE and vocational courses at Key Stage 4. The subject coordinator has a clear vision of how the subject should develop and considerable expertise as an external examiner. Careful attention has been given to the match of work to pupils' levels of attainment, to links to industry and to computer-aided design and control. Assessment is well established as an integral part of learning, although the analysis of results is not always sufficiently systematic or detailed to aid curricular planning. Documentation is generally good, but it lacks consistency across the subject, so adversely affecting continuity.

166. Teaching rooms are grouped together in resistant materials, but in food and textiles they are scattered and insufficient in number. This hinders effective teamwork and the efficient sharing of resources. There is an adequate range of equipment for computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture that provides a stimulating resource for pupils to research and to develop their projects. The amount of technical support is good in resistant materials, but insufficient in food.

Geography

167. Pupils' level of attainment at the end of both key stages is above the national expectation. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 1998 at the end of Key Stage 3, the results showed that pupils achieved an average level well above the national average. In 1999 this standard was maintained. In 1998 GCSE results were well above the national average. Achievement of the highest grades was below the national norm and no pupil gained the highest (A*) grade. Although results declined in 1999, the overall trend is upwards. Standards of attainment show a marked improvement since the last inspection.

168. The very good overall GCSE examination results were achieved as a result of good teaching, good preparation for the examination, thorough revision, and well organised and effectively managed coursework. The department has carried out a careful analysis of the results, has identified areas for improvement and has implemented clear strategies for raising pupils' level of attainment further.

169. Pupils show a very good knowledge of what places are like, how landscapes are formed and the effects of changes in the environment on the lives of people. One group of pupils in Year 9, for example, has good knowledge of the climate, landscape and way of life and culture of the people of Japan. They have good knowledge of the natural hazards which may occur in the country and of the effects of these events on cities, transport routes and services. The majority of pupils are not confident, however, in using their knowledge to describe and explain features in new material. All pupils have a good knowledge of geographical terms which are used effectively by the higher-attaining pupils. At Key Stage 4, pupils provide clear and relevant examples of features they have studied.

170. All pupils have very good skill in collecting information from a wide range of resource material, including atlases. They have a good understanding of the methods of geographical enquiry in collecting data, interpreting results and forming conclusions. This skill is used effectively, for example, in producing a fieldwork enquiry into the features of a short stretch of the River Tees for GCSE coursework. Written answers are generally accurate and well written, with the best pieces of extended writing showing good use of geographical terms. Pupils have good numerical skills. This ability is not exploited fully, however, because the range of methods used to analyse and interpret statistical data is narrow.

171. Pupils' progress is good throughout the school. Very good progress is made in gaining knowledge, because lessons are conducted at a brisk pace, with clear explanations, well-structured exercises and a good choice of resources. In one lesson, for example, a group of pupils in Year 8 made good progress studying the value of the tropical rainforest. Following a brisk and clear introduction to the lesson, the pupils brainstormed their ideas in pairs, shared them with the rest of the class, used a clearly presented resource to produce a list of products originating from the rainforest, joined in discussion with the teacher, and recorded their ideas in a diagram. Pupils make good progress in gaining knowledge of geographical terms through a focus on key terms for a lesson and a skilful introduction and regular use of these terms during the lesson by the teacher. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress through encouraging support and their own hard work.

172. Pupils have a good attitude to the subject. They are well motivated and interested, and have a very positive approach to their work. They are secure and confident. They listen very carefully to explanations and the majority are willing to make a contribution to lessons. Behaviour is very good. Pupils work hard and are keen to produce accurate work. They have a good ability to concentrate and persevere with extended pieces of work. They maintain their books in good order and present work carefully.

173. The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and none is unsatisfactory. There has been a significant improvement in teaching since the last inspection through greater consistency in providing lessons of good quality and a greater focus on enquiry skills and case studies. Relationships in class and the management of pupils are very good. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to provide clear

explanations and to plan well-structured work with a clear focus. Resources are of good quality and used effectively.

174. Lessons start briskly and this good pace is generally maintained throughout. In Year 9, for example, a short piece of video and a well-chosen article were used to illustrate the effects of an earthquake. Following a brisk and clear explanation and discussion, the teacher provided supporting materials of good quality to ensure that pupils could successfully produce their own newspaper article. There is, however, a lack of exercises which enable pupils to explore and consolidate their understanding by applying their knowledge to new topics. Work is generally pitched at an appropriate level for most pupils, but lessons often lack the rigour required to challenge the higher-attaining pupils fully. Marking is up to date and in line with departmental policy. Homework is purposeful and set regularly.

175. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. There is a sound teaching scheme for Key Stage 3, but the lack of a detailed scheme for Key Stage 4 results in the progression of work not being clearly indicated. There is a good programme of fieldwork that provides good support for GCSE coursework and includes the opportunity for pupils to participate in a field visit to Germany. The use of IT in the subject is being slowly developed. Procedures for the assessment and recording of pupils' progress are very good, but this information is underused to guide individual pupils.

176. The leadership of the department is good. There is a very good ethos and commitment to high achievement, but planning for future development is poor. The three well-equipped geography rooms are some distance apart, causing inefficiency and a lack of departmental identity. Excellent displays, which include pupils' work, testify to the enthusiasm and hard work of the well-qualified and experienced staff. The quality and quantity of resources are good. The department has responded well to the issues raised in the previous report and is in a strong position to make still further improvement.

History

By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment is above that expected nationally. Teachers assessed their pupils as being well above the national average in 1998 and assessments for 1999 were in line with the 1998 average. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above the national average.

178. Pupils taking the GCSE course in Key Stage 4 reach standards which are above the national average. The percentage of pupils who achieved grades A*-C was well above the national average in 1996 and was above it in 1997 and 1998. The percentage achieving grades A*-C in 1999 was a little below that of 1998. The proportion of those who gained A*/A grades has been consistently above, and often well above, the national average for the last five years. This is an improvement on achievement at the time of the last inspection. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above the national average, and a significant minority of it was well above average.

179. Pupils in Key Stage 3 see and explain the causes of past events and use an appropriate range of sources confidently to build up evidence about the past, as, for example, in work using recruitment posters to explain why men joined the armed forces in 1914. They use IT effectively to research and communicate their findings. Higher attainers evaluate sources confidently and produce extended written work of good quality. Many pupils, however, have difficulty explaining why different views of the past may exist.

180. Pupils taking GCSE see, explain and link the causes of past events. They use sources competently, interpreting them effectively to make deductions about the motives for peoples' actions in the past. Lower attainers have difficulty using and making deductions from complex sources. Pupils taking the Certificate of Achievement course at Key Stage 4 research a range of sources for information about the past soundly as, for example, in a lesson on the early life of Adolf Hitler.

181. The progress of pupils in Key Stage 3 is good. Most pupils acquire sound knowledge and understanding about the past and learn to use sources for evidence to explain why things happened. The effective use of individually researched topics helps higher attainers to make good progress in developing their extended writing. Lower attainers and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, helped by appropriately matched work. The positive attitude to work from most pupils contributes much to their progress.

182. The majority of pupils taking the GCSE examination course make good progress. They extend their knowledge, understanding, and competence in using evidence to explain the past. The work set by teachers gives higher attainers the opportunities to develop the higher-level skills needed for the top grades in the examination. The progress of lower attainers who take GCSE is satisfactory, but is often restricted by the requirements in the course to read and understand difficult sources. The progress of the small number of pupils with special educational needs taking the Certificate of Achievement course is good. Pupils' progress is furthered by thorough teaching of the content and skills of the GCSE course and by a positive approach to work by the majority of pupils on both courses.

183. The behaviour of pupils is nearly always good and often very good. Most have a mature approach to work, show interest and want to do well. The majority of pupils participate well in lessons and work cooperatively in pairs or small groups. They organise themselves well, show consideration to others and help one another as, for example, in a lesson in which pupils worked in the resource centre researching (including using the Internet) trench life in World War 1.

184. The quality of teaching is good overall, and never less than satisfactory. Teachers know their subject well at all levels, plan their work effectively and expect all pupils to work hard and behave well. They use an appropriate range of teaching approaches, including some effective use of IT, to develop pupils' research skills. For instance, a lesson in Key Stage 4 on the Stresemann era in Germany, in which pupils were asked to consider, in groups, solutions to Germany's problems following World War 1, was successful in helping pupils to understand that solutions were not straightforward.

185. Teachers communicate their enthusiasm for the subject to the pupils, who respond well. For example, in a lesson on the domestic system of industry pupils were given the opportunity to feel an unwashed fleece and to decide what would need to be done to make it into cloth. Work set and teaching styles used encourage higher attainers to make good progress. Marking is regular, although comments on work at Key Stage 3 do not always show pupils how they might improve. Relationships are very good and lessons proceed briskly in a firm but friendly atmosphere.

186. Statutory requirements are met at Key Stage 3. The specialist staff are well led and create a very good ethos for learning that contributes much to pupils' progress. Assessment at both key stages is good, although schemes of work for Key Stage 3 do not refer to the key elements of the National Curriculum. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in the provision of suitable books for lower attainers. The department has access to a small number of computers within the department and makes effective, although limited, use of the IT hardware available in the resources centre. Good use is made of fieldwork at both key stages.

Information technology

187. At the end of Key Stage 3 the overall attainment of pupils is in line with the national expectation. Girls' results in the National Curriculum assessments taken in 1998 and 1999 were above those of boys at Level 5+, although there was no significant difference between girls and boys at Level 6. Pupils' knowledge and skills in IT are not as high as in some of their other subjects by the end of Key Stage 3, because they have interrupted teaching in the subject in Year 9.

188. Pupils are competent in word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and databases and are familiar with the Internet to search for information. They research, refine and present information appropriately in different forms and styles, as when using the Internet to research a history project, entering spreadsheet formulae in mathematics or composing music. Pupils are familiar with control in IT and create sets of instructions to draw shapes in mathematics, set up data-loggers in science and explore the effects of computer-aided etching to create products in design and technology. Higher-attaining pupils work largely independently to improve the presentation of their work.

189. Standards are generally above average at the end of Key Stage 4. The 1999 GCSE results in information systems, taken by just over half the pupils, were well above the most recent national average, and were better than those in 1998. Results were also above average in 1997. Overall, pupils have good opportunities to use IT in other subjects and easy access to resources outside lessons. This allows pupils of all abilities to work effectively and achieve high standards of accuracy and presentation. Pupils completing units of study in GNVQ courses at Foundation and Intermediate levels apply IT skills effectively and achieve standards in line with course requirements.

190. Progress in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. In the specific IT lessons in Years 7 and 8, boys and girls show equally keen interest and make good progress in handling information and data. These skills are encouraged and extended in, for example, mathematics in Years 7 and 9 through investigations on measurement. In some lessons in English, art, geography and history pupils, including those with special educational needs, use word processing and desktop publishing to improve the presentation of their work. They develop knowledge and skills in control, using screen robots in mathematics and sensors in science and in design and technology. In Year 9, however, pupils have no continuous programme of lessons in IT and no coherent experience of using it in other subjects. This hampers their progress. By the end of Year 9, girls show significantly better progress than boys.

191. Pupils in Key Stage 4 generally make good progress and successfully build on their knowledge and skills in the subject. As they move through the school, pupils are encouraged to carry out individual research, to make informed choices and to plan their work with increasing responsibility. In the taught GCSE courses pupils make very rapid progress, although this is mainly in handling information. They develop a critical awareness of IT in society through, for example, researching GCSE projects or making visits to industry and business. At both key stages pupils with special educational needs make good progress, especially when extra support is provided in class.

192. Pupils have good attitudes to learning in all years. They respond well to teachers and are supportive of one another. They listen effectively, concentrate well and follow instructions carefully to work to their best standard. A large and growing proportion of pupils have access to computer facilities at home and are confident in their use. They work well cooperatively, but concentrate and maintain the best pace of work when working independently. Pupils enjoy challenging tasks that develop their knowledge and understanding. They are prepared to refine work to improve their standards and appreciate the school's good resources and guidance to help them to learn. Occasionally pupils lose concentration when waiting for help in a large class or when they are insufficiently challenged.

193. Teaching is good (and occasionally very good) throughout the school and this quality contributes significantly to pupils' good achievements. A team of very experienced teachers from different subject areas, including the headteacher and two deputies, plan together and work from their personal strengths within the subject. The teaching of information studies at GCSE is very competent and pupils are prepared well for examinations in the slim time allocated. Resources are used effectively in most lessons as, for example, in a lesson on control, where a good demonstration helped pupils to understand the procedures to draw and then to apply them confidently. Teaching is most effective where pupils are expected to think imaginatively and to evaluate their work critically in order to improve their standards in IT. Teachers

know their pupils well and set clear targets to help them to improve their work. Teachers' analysis of assessments is not, however, sufficiently systematic or detailed to identify and explain differences in boys' and girls' attainment and progress, particularly in Key Stage 3.

Statutory requirements are met at both key stages. Since the last inspection GCSE examination results have improved owing to a significant investment of resources and a generally better match of work to pupils' experience and abilities. Planning does not, however, sufficiently cater for the variety in pupils' previous experience on entry in Year 7, achieve effective continuity and progression in Year 9, or allow sufficient time for the GCSE courses. The subject is well led and there are effective means for promoting curricular improvements. Many teachers in other subjects use IT confidently to support pupils' learning. The technical and support staff for the subject are good.

Modern foreign languages

195. In 1998 the percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-C in GCSE examinations was in line with the national average in French and well above average in German. The attainment of pupils in German matched that in their other subjects. In French, boys did as well as in most of their other subjects, but girls did significantly less well. The proportion of pupils attaining the highest (A*) grade was in line with the national average in German, but below it in French. In 1999 the percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-C was well above the previous year's national averages in both languages. The proportion of pupils achieving A* in German doubled, but in French remained below average. In 1999, pupils performed slightly better in French than in other subjects, and in German much better.

196. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 indicated that pupils' overall attainment was above the national average in both 1998 and 1999. Evidence from the inspection shows that standards currently at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the national average in all areas of linguistic skill. Pupils note significant points when listening to spoken language and many confidently read texts containing both familiar and unfamiliar language. The use of some lessons specifically to teach reading helps to promote good standards. Most pupils produce writing by adapting written models. Higher-attaining pupils begin to write independently and some are very creative in their writing. Pupils speak readily in response to the teachers' questions, but in conversations many have to make regular reference to the written word, on which they are very dependent.

197. By the end of Key Stage 4 the overall standard is above average. Pupils understand written and spoken language from a variety of sources. Higher-attaining pupils express ideas and opinions over a range of topics in their writing and their work is mostly accurate. Many pupils speak readily in the foreign language when they have carefully learnt set answers to specific questions, but most do not take part in conversations where the outcome is not predictable. The pronunciation of some pupils is weak, particularly in French. The pronunciation of pupils is much better in those lessons in which they hear high-quality spoken French for most of the time.

198. In lessons seen during the inspection most pupils made good progress in both key stages. They make suitable progress not only in learning new vocabulary, but also in learning linguistic structures. This is an improvement on the last inspection. Many pupils also make good progress in learning grammar, but only the highest attainers apply this learning to produce consistently accurate written language. Many acquire good skill in using dictionaries. In around a quarter of the lessons pupils made very good progress. In a German lesson in Year 8, for example, a group of low-attaining pupils, most of whom have statements of special educational need, made very good progress in expressing opinions about their favourite things, because they responded well to the teacher's very high expectations. Progress in a small number of lessons, however, is only just satisfactory. In these lessons pupils are allowed to work at too slow a pace.

199. Pupils' attitudes to their work are good. Most take their learning seriously and are not afraid to

ask for clarification on points that they do not understand. They readily do the work they are asked and listen carefully to teachers' instructions. Most do their homework diligently. In paired or group work they work well together. In a few lessons, however, pupils do not work at a fast enough pace. In two lessons observed some pupils did not pay sufficient attention to the teacher.

200. Teaching is mostly good. In around a quarter of the lessons the teaching observed was very good. In a German lesson in Year 11, for example, the teacher enabled the pupils to use newly practised language in unfamiliar contexts, because she first gave them the opportunity to practise the language and then encouraged them not to rely on the written word as a prompt when speaking.

201. The teachers are competent linguists and, in most lessons, use French or German as the main means of communication in class. In a few lessons there is too much use of English, including its use for almost the whole lesson. The same weakness was reported in the last inspection. Some teachers, however, avoid the use of English well by the imaginative use of overhead projectors to present and practise new language. Teachers use a range of teaching approaches, including whole-class, individual and paired activities. In most lessons they ensure that all pupils do the work they are asked, but do not ensure that all pupils, in particular the highest attainers, work at a sufficiently fast pace. During the week of the inspection homework was well used to develop and extend the class work.

202. The languages faculty is effectively led and works well as a team. Language rooms are grouped together and teachers make them attractive environments for learning foreign languages. The faculty is constantly seeking ways to increase enthusiasm in the school for learning languages. The development of study visits and exchanges and the use of foreign language assistants help to develop this enthusiasm. The department meets the statutory requirement to teach the National Curriculum programmes of study.

Music

203. By the end of Key Stage 3 the attainment of pupils is in line with the national average. Pupils perform and compose to a satisfactory standard. They use both tuned percussion and electronic keyboards to play, recreate and invent simple phrases and melodies and add chords and drum tracks. At this stage, pupils make much use of keyboards not only to perform and compose, but also to learn about scales, chords and notation. Knowledge of the rudiments of music is good, partly as a result of the regular teaching and practice on keyboards. Most pupils also use the computer to help them to learn musical notation and to compose.

204. Pupils acquire at this key stage a broad background knowledge of music of the Caribbean, Africa and the Far East. This knowledge arises out of practical work, which takes place in every lesson. They know and understand a fair range of musical forms and conventions as, for example, through the study of a Mozart rondo or the repeating and changing patterns in the minimalist music of Steve Reich.

205. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is above the national average. In the 1997 and 1998 examinations in GCSE, taken together, 26 out of 30 pupils gained grades of A*-C. Three of these pupils in 1997 gained grade A*, the only year in which A* grades were achieved; the school can offer no obvious reason for this exceptional result. The most recent results in 1999 follow the overall trend since 1995.

206. In Key Stage 4 most pupils perform with varying degrees of skill on individual instruments. Most have a useful facility on the keyboard to perform and compose, or use it as an appropriate aid to musical understanding. By the end of the key stage they compose pieces in a good range of styles and with varied instrumentation. Pieces include simulated Celtic jigs and reels, minimalist music influenced by African thumb-piano music and keyboard music based on a countryside theme. They acquire a good working knowledge of Western music from the main historical periods as, for instance, in their study of a Bach *Brandenburg Concerto* and Handel's *Messiah* as exemplars of the Baroque period. Theoretical studies are

almost always reinforced by the pupils' playing of pieces from the period by their pastiche compositions. At both key stages pupils' attainments in performance on an instrument are good overall, as exemplified by Associated Board examination results.

207. Progress in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Pupils arrive in Year 7 with varied levels of musical experience, but overall their attainment on entry is broadly average. Early lessons concentrate on the elements of music and carefully guided composition, through which they learn the names of notes on keyboards and an elementary understanding of notation. Much of the work throughout the key stage is concerned with learning how scales and chords are constructed and how melody and harmony combine. They develop an understanding and fair working knowledge of different scales and modes as, for example, when they compose a short melody in the Aeolian mode over a simple chord sequence.

208. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 4. They benefit from the good foundations laid in the previous key stage in understanding and using melody, rhythm and harmony. Pupils' good all-round progress is also facilitated by their skills as instrumentalists. As they work to the requirements of the GCSE course, they develop good, and sometimes very good, background knowledge and analytical skills in their studies of particular works. They also develop a good working knowledge of musical terminology. For example, in a lesson on *The Messiah*, they drew on their own experience as players to discuss orchestration and used terms such as monophonic and polyphonic to describe sections of the work.

209. In almost all lessons pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Attitudes in Key Stage 4 are very good. Most pupils show a genuine interest in their work: they listen well and respond readily to their teachers' questions. Overall, pupils behave well in lessons and show respect for one another and towards their teachers. In some classes there is a small number of pupils who are less inclined to learn and whose behaviour is disruptive. Pupils take good care of furniture and equipment. From Year 7 onwards they are encouraged to work in groups, both in the classroom and in adjacent corridors. Most of them get on well with their work, even when they are not directly supervised. By the end of Key Stage 4 almost all pupils have acquired a good, and sometimes very good, level of self-discipline for successful study.

210. Teaching is good overall. The two members of staff in the department teach groups in both key stages. They know their subject well and have good skills as performers, accompanists and conductors. These skills are especially evident in the GCSE work. Discipline is good in lessons and teachers deal skilfully with pupils who behave in an unacceptable way. In a small number of lessons the pace slows down, partly as a result of misjudged planning. Occasionally, teachers rely too heavily on a few particularly articulate pupils to answer questions.

211. Long-term planning is good and lessons are always well prepared. Teachers know the pupils well and make suitable allowances and give reasonable challenges according to individual needs. Pupils with special educational needs are given extra attention and, frequently, extra access to the computer as a teaching aid. Assessment is good overall and very good at Key Stage 3. At this stage almost every piece of work is checked and recorded. Success on the keyboard is closely monitored as a result of a series of tasks graded in levels of difficulty. At Key Stage 4, assessments are accurately carried out with proper reference to GCSE requirements. A team of visiting teachers covers most instruments and makes a good contribution to the overall work of the department.

212. Approximately 70 pupils receive instrumental lessons and at least 120 take part in extracurricular activities which include an orchestra, wind band, recorder group, choir and jazz band. In addition, many pupils form music groups for inter-house activities, which are a strong feature of the school's provision.

Physical education

213. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is largely in line with that expected nationally. In games lessons a significant minority of pupils attain good standards in basic skills and tactical play. They control, pass, catch and tackle with good technique. Many pupils have a good knowledge of the rules of a range of games. In gymnastics boys and girls plan their sequences well and girls perform with at least average fluency and control. The work of many boys lacks these qualities and their practical work is below the expected standard. Many pupils attain good standards in swimming and the vast majority swim with good technique in at least one recognised stroke.

214. At the end of Key Stage 4 a significant minority of pupils attain standards in games that are beyond those expected nationally - especially those pupils who are regularly involved in extracurricular activity. Many pupils extend their range of skills in their chosen activities and participate effectively in the full adult version of games, as evidenced by the school's good record in competitive sport. Results in the GCSE examination have been good since 1996. In 1998 the pass rate at the higher (A*-C) grades was 81 per cent, very high when compared with the national average. This figure fell to 68 per cent in 1999. Pupils currently taking the GCSE course attain largely good standards in lessons on the theory of the subject. Higher-attaining pupils have at least a sound knowledge and understanding of the scientific aspects of the course. Many speak and write well about the role of the press in reporting sport. A minority of lower-attaining pupils find the theory difficult to comprehend and recall, and attain below average standards. Most pupils attain good, and often very good, standards in practical work.

215. In both key stages pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in lessons and over longer periods. In games lessons in Key Stage 3 boys and girls steadily increase their range of skills. In a football lesson boys in Year 7 significantly improved their passing and their ability to use space to receive a pass. Over only five lessons many girls in Year 7 have much improved the quality of their gymnastic sequences. Boys, however, have made little progress and many still perform at a level more appropriate for primary school. In Key Stage 4 most pupils continue to make good progress as they pursue their chosen activities. The best progress over time and in lessons is made in games where many boys have refined their knowledge, skills and understanding to the extent that they perform competently in the adult version of the games. Appropriate intervention by teachers, coupled with a clear demonstration of good practice, enabled pupils in basketball and hockey lessons to correct faults in their technique. Lack of intervention in a badminton lesson had the opposite effect: pupils continued to make the same mistakes. Pupils following the GCSE course make good progress in their practical work and in theory lessons, because they are given a reasonable degree of responsibility to discuss and solve problems.

216. In nearly all lessons pupils work with much enthusiasm and sustained commitment. They listen well, observe demonstrations carefully and make good use of time to practise and refine their skills. They cooperate well with partners and in groups. When placed in competitive situations, they play with due regard for the rules. When working on a climbing wall for only the second time, for example, pupils in Year 10 adopted a very mature approach and took much responsibility for the safety of their peers. Pupils' written work is largely well presented. In all lessons standards of dress and behaviour are very good.

217. In about one-fifth of lessons teaching is very good and in a further two-fifths it is good. It is never less than satisfactory overall. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject. In most lessons they expect much from the pupils and set tasks that challenge most of them. In the best lessons teachers make good use of question and answer sessions to check on pupils' understanding and progress. In some (but not enough) lessons teachers group pupils according to their prior attainment. This arrangement enables all pupils to be appropriately and strongly challenged. In a minority of lessons the higher-attaining pupils are insufficiently challenged. Those pupils who, for whatever reason, do not take part in practical work are

given worthwhile tasks that require them to observe carefully how other pupils learn. The previous inspection report commented that pupils had too few opportunities to evaluate their performances. Teachers now afford pupils such opportunities. On occasions, when working with option groups at Key Stage 4, teachers do not intervene often enough to explain or show pupils how they can improve their performances.

218. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met and the time available at Key Stage 4 is now adequate. The two 45-minute lessons at Key Stage 3 are minimal and below the national average. The curriculum has good breadth and balance except in the area of striking and fielding games, for which insufficient time is allowed. No opportunities exist for cricket. This is a weakness in provision that has been the subject of critical comment from both parents and pupils. The assessment of pupils' work is largely accurate. In Year 10, however, teachers' inflation of anticipated GCSE grades to encourage pupils does not provide pupils with a true picture of their attainment. Insufficient use is made of attainment data to identify how pupils might make better progress.

219. The school has very good facilities for the subject. At a recent inspection by the local authority a number of safety concerns were identified. Some have been addressed. A statutory assessment of risks to health and safety has not been completed.

220. About three-quarters of pupils are regularly involved in one or more of a good range of extracurricular activities and about a half in inter-school or other competitive sports. This excellent take-up is matched by the commendable response of 30 members of staff and six parents. These adults give up much time to coach, supervise and officiate at these activities, so affording pupils many good opportunities to enhance their skills and their personal and social development.

Religious education

221. The overall standard of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above that normally found in work on the Agreed Syllabus. Pupils gain very good knowledge and understanding of different religions. Their skill in recording their own views and giving reasons for them are average. In Year 7, for example, pupils understand the symbolism of water in religion, and their thoughts and poems about water and waterfalls develop their understanding of spirituality well. Pupils have very good Biblical knowledge. They draw well, for example, on their knowledge of the Exodus when they learn about the Seder meal and about the symbolism of different foods and the messages they convey. They learn about Hebrew and copy the writing and meanings of Hebrew words. By the end of this key stage pupils show that they remember and understand well what they previously learnt about, for example, Hindu beliefs. Pupils learn not only about religion, but also from religion and how to "search the soul" in self-examination.

224. In a minority of classes in Key Stage 3, such as when they discuss Martin Luther King's famous speech, the written work of girls is much more thoughtful than that of boys, but boys volunteer to read aloud, give answers and ask questions more often than girls. There is often, however, little difference in the standard of written work of pupils of different levels of attainment, because the tasks set are often undemanding for higher attainers. Homework, which often includes research, is set regularly, but parents feel it is sometimes too time-consuming.

225. The GCSE short course was taken by all pupils in Key Stage 4 for one year in 1997-1998, but the school has reverted to a GCSE full course; the subject is taught within the social studies programme for those not taking the full course. Examination results have been continuously rising since 1995 and 78 percent obtained grades A*-C in 1997, a level well above the national average. In 1998, when the short course was introduced, fewer pupils than in previous years reached grades A*-B. Results for the short course were well above the national average, with all pupils achieving grades A-C.

226. Standards in lessons at Key Stage 4 are above average overall, ranging from average to well above

average. Pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject. Christian and Islamic beliefs are studied and pupils record carefully the similarities and differences they note. Whilst pupils' ability to produce written arguments is above average, their ability to argue orally is only average. In lessons where the subject is taught within social studies pupils reach very good standards when they discuss issues such as capital punishment: they express a wide range of views and have good standards of discussion in groups. Pupils relate Christian teaching well to moral issues. They write in a range of styles and their arguments are often firmly based on religious teaching, with appropriate textual references. Pupils show that they have both learned about religion and from religion in the oral and written answers that they give.

227. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3. This good progress is directly related to good teaching, which includes very good pace and a wide variety of activities and resources. Pupils gain considerable amounts of knowledge and understanding of concepts throughout lessons. Most lessons are very carefully planned and teachers constantly refer back to knowledge pupils have previously gained. There are often very good cross-curricular links with subjects such as English and geography. The subject strongly promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as, for example, when teachers talked about the meaning of the words "awe" and "wonder" in discussing a waterfall. Pupils' social and moral development was promoted well when they considered, for instance, the racial issues which led to Martin Luther King's speech. Their written work in Year 9 shows very good progress over three years, with much writing in depth and at length.

228. The progress of pupils of different levels of attainment is mainly similar; those of higher capability achieve higher levels through their own efforts rather than because more challenging work is expected of them. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, as they are given appropriate individual support. When progress is unsatisfactory, too little is covered in a lesson and pupils' good work is not shared with others to stimulate higher standards.

229. Progress in Key Stage 4 is at least good and often very good. Excellent progress is made through, for example, drama and a visit to a mosque, when pupils gain deep understanding of the feelings of others. Considerable knowledge and understanding have been gained over time because of teachers' constant questioning and the clear teaching of facts. Good (sometimes very good) progress is made in learning how to put forward a written argument and in acquiring factual knowledge to back up opinions in readiness for examination questions. Pupils write well from their own viewpoint and from weighing up a range of evidence. Where progress is unsatisfactory, the expectations of teachers are too low for mature, questioning pupils or a depth of knowledge and understanding is forfeited for a very fast pace of direct teaching.

230. The response of pupils is good overall in both key stages. In Key Stage 3 their response ranges from satisfactory to excellent. Pupils gain confidence within a lesson and a larger number volunteer answers as lessons progress. Pupils are usually very attentive to teachers, although teachers sometimes talk over the pupils' chatter rather than establish quiet. In some lessons this is because of the excitement of the activity and the enthusiasm of the pupils to participate, but in a small minority of lessons a code of good conduct has not been successfully established. Pupils are generally hardworking, settling quickly and writing at speed and with determination. They are lively and interested in the subject, willingly volunteer answers, and enjoy reading aloud (which they do with clarity).

231. In Key Stage 4, pupils' response ranges from unsatisfactory to excellent, but is good overall. Where it is unsatisfactory, the lesson starts late or pupils are noisy and chat through the teacher's introduction or some do not concentrate. Where their response is excellent, they good-naturedly take part in a drama activity, answer questions continuously and give their total attention throughout lessons, obviously enjoying what they learn. Boys are often more forthcoming in giving answers voluntarily, but girls respond well when the teacher directs questions at them. In a small minority of lessons, however,

pupils are very slow to respond. When teachers ask open-ended questions, pupils give more detailed answers. Relationships are good in all classes both between peers and between teachers and pupils. Within groups pupils are thoughtful and responsive.

232. The quality of teaching in both key stages is generally good and often very good. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, pupils' lack of concentration and chatter are insufficiently checked or lessons have too little pace. All teachers are specialists and have very good knowledge of the subject. They have generally high expectations of their pupils, although they sometimes expect too little of high attainers and do not provide simplified texts for those with language problems. Lessons often include a large number of different and imaginative activities. The management of pupils is mainly good and the use of time and resources is very good indeed. Teachers know their pupils well. Assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory, but homework is rarely planned as a link between lessons.

233. Teaching promotes very good progress in understanding, because teachers begin from the pupils' own experiences and usually only use textual material after pupils' own concepts have been discussed. This approach widens pupils' views and adds well to their existing knowledge. Whilst IT is little used in the department, because of the few resources available, pupils are encouraged to use the library's computers and the Internet for research. They do this regularly, often under the supervision of one of the teachers.

234. The subject is very well led by the head of department, who gives very clear direction for the subject and is supported well by his colleagues. Very good progress has been maintained since the last inspection. Within the department teachers monitor and observe each other's teaching. Curricular development is good, based on a detailed and clear scheme of work. The ethos for learning is very good, with specialist teachers keen to share their knowledge with pupils. The similar teaching styles within the department - a focus on questioning pupils, building carefully on previous knowledge and providing a suitably large number of different activities within a lesson – generally promote thorough learning and prepare pupils very well for external examinations.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

Time spent observing lessons during the inspection

KEY STAGE	3	4	TOTAL
lessons seen	121	91	212
hours	96	75	171

233. The team of 16 inspectors visited the school for a combined total of 55 days. During the week of the inspection the team observed 212 whole lessons or parts of lessons, many morning and afternoon registration and form-tutor sessions, assemblies and a range of extracurricular activities.

234. All teachers at school during the inspection (including the headteacher) were seen teaching, most several times. Eighty-one planned discussions were held with governors, the headteacher, the senior management team, all heads of departments and other staff responsible for particular policies or aspects of the school's work. Inspectors had 15 further discussions with a wide range of non-teaching, support and community staff, including staff from the local education authority. The headteacher of a contributory primary school was also interviewed.

235. Inspectors looked in depth at all the work of a representative sample of 15 pupils (three drawn from each of Years 7 to 11) as well as of pupils with special educational needs. Planned, formal discussions were held with 21 pupils and informal discussions took place with many more.

236. Documentation provided by the school about all aspects of its work was analysed by the team in detail before and during the inspection. Three meetings were held at the school before the inspection - with the teaching staff, with the governing body, and with 27 parents at a specially arranged meeting. The team considered responses from 163 parents to a questionnaire about their opinions of the school. The inspection team gave feedback on their performance, both formally and informally, to all teaching staff who wished to receive it. The Registered Inspector reported back after the inspection to the senior management team (both orally and in writing) and to the governing body.

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
Y7 - Y11	1218	34	187	159

Teachers and classes (Y7-Y11) :

Qualified teachers

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):

66.1

Number of pupils per qualified teacher:

18.4

Education support staff

Total number of education support staff:

6

Total aggregate hours worked each week:

222

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:

79.4

Average teaching group size:

KS3

25

KS4

21

Financial data

Financial year:

1998-1999

	£
Total Income	2,549,367
Total Expenditure	2,519,785
Expenditure per pupil	2,070
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	29,582

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	1218
Number of questionnaires returned:	163

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	6	56	22	15	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	23	61	6	9	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	6	48	36	7	3
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	6	49	25	18	2
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	10	53	18	15	4
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	25	59	8	7	1
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	17	62	10	10	1
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	14	58	6	18	4
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	15	54	20	9	2
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	10	55	26	7	2
My child(ren) like(s) school	25	56	12	4	3

Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents on 55 of the 163 questionnaires returned.

Amongst the positive points mentioned were:

pleasure at children's high attainment and good progress;
the dedication and quality of most teachers;
the high effectiveness of pastoral care, especially through the House system; and
the wide range of extracurricular activities.

Amongst the concerns expressed in some questionnaires were:

disruption by a small minority of pupils in some lessons;
too little homework being set;
study leave for GCSE examinations starting too soon;
pupils' planners being insufficiently checked by the school; and
insufficient information being provided about the curriculum and pupils' progress.