

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **BURFORD SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Burford

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123235

Headteacher: Mr. P. Sanders

Reporting inspector: Mr. D. Driscoll  
11933

Dates of inspection: 27<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2000

Inspection number: 184142

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Cheltenham Road Burford Oxfordshire
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Telephone number:	01193 823303
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. M. Harper
Date of previous inspection:	31 <sup>st</sup> October 1994

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			The school's results and students' achievements
			Teaching and learning
			Key Issues for action
			Leadership and management
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			Students' welfare, health and safety
			Partnership with parents and carers
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Christine Harrison	Team inspector	Science	Quality and range of opportunities for learning
Cheryl Jackson	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Burford School and Community College is a mixed comprehensive school educating students between the ages of 11 and 18. There are 1035 students on roll, very few of whom are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The school is one of only a handful of state schools to have its own boarding provision. There are 88 boarders, most of whom are from families serving in the armed forces. The proportion of students who speak English as a second language is high, but almost all are fluent speakers of English. Students' attainment on entry to the school is above average. The proportion of students on the school's register of students with special educational needs is below average, but the proportion with statements is broadly average. The socio-economic circumstances of the students are generally above average.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education and is clearly improving. Most students achieve standards appropriate for their attainment on entry to the school, although those with special educational needs make unsatisfactory progress towards the targets on their individual education plans. Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good. Teaching is satisfactory. The school is now well led and managed and is improving again after a period of significant decline. Overall the school provides satisfactory value for money and the sixth form is particularly cost effective.

#### **What the school does well**

- Results at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above the national average and the average for similar schools.
- Standards of work seen during the inspection were above the levels expected nationally at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Students' attitudes are good and they demonstrate a great enthusiasm for the very good range of extra curricular activities provided by the school.
- The provision made for boarding students is very good.
- Behaviour is good and the incidence of exclusions is low.
- The school has good systems for monitoring and promoting good behaviour.
- The school makes good provision for students' moral, social and cultural development.

#### **What could be improved**

- Students with special educational needs make unsatisfactory progress towards the targets on their individual education plans.
- Students are underachieving badly in information technology.
- Results at A level are below the national average because some students are on inappropriate courses.
- Many statutory requirements are not met.
- There is great variation in the amount of homework set.
- The provision for students' spiritual development is unsatisfactory.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.*

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school has made satisfactory progress since the time of the previous inspection (1994). At the time of the previous inspection staff morale was low and there was a significant proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Students were underachieving at Key Stage 3 and, as

these students moved up the school and took their GCSE examinations, results began to decline. However, since the appointment of the current headteacher, staff morale has improved and is now high. This has resulted in improved teaching and standards are now above the levels expected nationally at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. Results in the coming GCSE examinations look set to rise significantly. A weakness remains in the results of those students with special educational needs. Results at A level have declined and are below the national average owing to some students being placed on inappropriate courses. The school has been successful in targeting its resources and energies to those areas where they will have the most impact in terms of raising standards.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	B	B	C	C
A-levels/AS-levels	D	D	D	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Students' performances in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above both the national averages and the averages for similar schools in English, mathematics and science. The average points score per student at GCSE and the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C were close to both the national averages and the averages for similar schools. The proportion gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to G was below the national average and well below the average for similar schools. The proportion of students gaining one or more GCSEs at grades A\* to G was well below average and placed the school in the bottom five per cent of schools taking students from similar backgrounds. The best GCSE results were in business studies and geography; the worst were in home economics. Results at A level are below the national average. The best results were in geography and the worst in environmental science. GCSE results have risen at a rate that is below the national average, but look set to improve significantly this year. A level results have declined since the previous inspection. The school's targets for examination success are appropriately high.

In the work seen during the inspection, students are now achieving satisfactory standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form, given their levels of prior attainment. There is, however, significant underachievement in information technology.



## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good, especially at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good: There is little oppressive behaviour in the school and the number of exclusions is low.
Personal development and relationships	Good: Students respect the views of others and have positive relationships with staff and other students.
Attendance	Satisfactory: In line with national averages.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

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

Teaching is satisfactory or better in 94 per cent of lessons and very good or better in 15 per cent. Teaching is unsatisfactory or worse in 6 per cent of lessons.

Teaching at Key Stage 3 is good in English and mathematics and satisfactory in science. Teaching is also good in design and technology, music and physical education. At Key Stage 4, teaching is satisfactory in mathematics and science and good in English. Teaching is also good in art, design and technology, geography, history and physical education. The main strengths lie in the way that teachers manage their classes and the effectiveness of the teaching methods, whilst there are weaknesses in the setting of homework and the marking of work. In the sixth form, teaching is good in art, design and technology, geography, mathematics and physical education and is excellent in religious education. The strengths in teaching in the sixth form are the teachers' knowledge of the subject and the way that they manage students. The weakness lies in teachers' failure to insist upon well-organised notes and files. The school makes satisfactory provision for the teaching of literacy skills and good provision for the teaching of numeracy skills.

Overall, the teaching does not meet the needs of students with special educational needs because the individual education plans do not provide sufficient guidance to either students or teachers. All students, however, are made to work hard and to maintain their concentration in lessons. The variety of grades that are used in marking lead to students being unsure of their levels of attainment.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory: The school does not ensure that all students are taught the National Curriculum in information technology and modern foreign languages. There is no religious education in the sixth form and some students are placed on inappropriate courses. There is very good provision for extra curricular activities.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Unsatisfactory: Individual education plans are poor and do not support students' learning.
Provision for Students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory: The school makes good provision for students' moral, social and cultural development, but the provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
How well the school cares for its students	Satisfactory: Good efforts are made to promote good behaviour, but insufficient use is made of the information that the school has on students' academic performance. The boarding provision is very good.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good: The school is now clearly improving after a period of decline. Staff morale has been raised and all are pulling together in order to improve standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Unsatisfactory: Despite its good work in many areas, the Governing Body fails to meet many statutory requirements.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory: Very good systems for appraisal but monitoring by heads of departments varies between very good and unsatisfactory.
The strategic use of resources	Good: The school raises considerable funds for itself and targets them well to the school's priorities.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The improvements since the appointment of the current headteacher.</li> <li>The progress made by the students.</li> <li>The ease with which they could approach the school with problems</li> <li>The standards expected of the students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The consistency with which homework is set.</li> <li>The information provided on their child's progress.</li> <li>The partnership that the school has with parents.</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees with parent's views, with the exception of the school's partnership with them. Parents appear to be referring back to problems with communications under the previous management.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

1. Attainment in the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1999 was well above the national average. The proportions of students reaching level five or above were above the national average in mathematics and well above the national averages in English and science. The proportions reaching level six or above were well above the national averages in all three subjects. Overall, results were well above the national averages in all three subjects. Although the average results over the past four years show that boys tend to achieve better results than girls, the trend was completely reversed in 1999 and the girls achieved better results than the boys did. Results fell in 1997 and have been rising steadily ever since. This trend holds true for all three core subjects, although the improvement in English has been most dramatic.
2. Overall, results are well above those of schools taking students from similar backgrounds and this is true for all three core subjects.
3. The standards of the work seen during the inspection are above the level expected nationally at the age of 14 and students are achieving satisfactory standards given their attainment on entry to the school. The standards of work seen are lower than those indicated by the results of the national tests last year, but students are still attaining standards that are above the level expected nationally in English, mathematics and science. Standards are also above those expected in art, design and technology and religious education. Standards are broadly in line with the levels expected nationally in all other subjects, with the exception of information technology where students' attainment is below the level expected nationally. Students achieve well in art, design and technology, English, mathematics, music, physical education and religious education. However, students are underachieving badly in information technology.
4. In the GCSE examinations in 1999, the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grades A\* to C was in line with the national average. The proportion gaining five or more passes at grades A\* to G was below the national average and the proportion gaining one or more passes at grades A\* to G was well below average. Results against all three of these measures have declined since 1997, when all were either above or well above the national averages. The average points score per student in 1999 was close to the national average and has declined since 1997. Results, using the average GCSE points score per student, have risen at a rate that is slower than the national average. Boys performed significantly better than the girls did in 1999, but over the past three years there has been little difference in their overall performances. Students performed particularly well in business studies and geography and poorly in home economics. The school no longer teaches a course in home economics and all students now follow a full design and technology course.
5. Results in the 1999 GCSE examinations compared with schools with students from similar backgrounds were average for the proportion gaining five or more passes at grades A\* to C and well below average for the proportion gaining five or more passes at grades A\* to G. The average points score per student was close to the average for similar schools. The proportion gaining one or more passes at grades A\* to G was very low and places the

school in the bottom five per cent of schools with a similar intake nationally. This was largely the result of six students being taught off-site.

6. The students who sat GCSE examinations last year achieved satisfactory results overall, given their average attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. It was this group of students who were underachieving at Key Stage 3 at the time of the previous inspection and were suffering the effects of low staff morale. Since that time, the new headteacher has successfully concentrated on improving staff morale and the progress made by students at Key Stage 3.

7. The standards of the work seen during the inspection are above the level expected nationally at the age of 16 and students are now achieving satisfactory standards given their attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. Attainment is above the level expected nationally in design and technology, English, geography, history and mathematics. Attainment is below the level expected nationally in music and Spanish and well below in information technology. Students generally achieve well in art, design and technology, English, geography, history and physical education. However, students are underachieving badly in information technology.

8. By the ages of 14 and 16 the achievement of students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory. Many are not reaching the standards set for them because their needs have been poorly identified and there has been insufficient planning of suitable support. The targets identified on individual education plans are vague and the school is unable to measure the progress made towards them. A significant number do not study a foreign language at Key Stage 4 and make no progress at all in this subject. Even in subjects where the progress of the majority is good, the progress of students with special educational needs is often only satisfactory. This level of underachievement was partly responsible for the poor GCSE results of the lowest attainers, as indicated by the proportion achieving one or more grades at A\* to G, last year, although six students were taught off-site and obtained vocational qualifications rather than GCSEs.

9. Students who are gifted and talented generally make satisfactory progress throughout their schooling; they make good progress in religious education, geography, mathematics and physical education, but unsatisfactory progress in information technology.

10. The average A level points score per candidate was below the national average in 1999, as it had been for the past three years. Overall, results are now lower than they were at the time of the previous inspection. Many new students join the school in Year 12, as there are several schools in the area which do not have a sixth form. The students who sat their A level examinations achieved satisfactory results given their results at GCSE level on entering the sixth form. However, several students were placed on inappropriate courses where they had little realistic chance of success. Several of these students failed to gain any grade at all at A level and consequently lowered the school's average points score. The best results were in geography and the worst were in environmental science. Results fluctuate in each subject on a yearly basis according to the attainment of the students on starting the course. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were well above the level expected in religious education and above the standard expected in art, design and technology and geography. Standards were appropriate for an A level course in all other subjects inspected.

11. Overall, standards have improved, since the last inspection, in English, geography, mathematics and religious education but have declined in information technology and music. Whilst high standards have been maintained in some subjects, there has been insufficient improvement in the standards in art and modern foreign languages.

12. Across the whole curriculum students' skills in literacy are broadly in line with the standards expected nationally. In English, students have the opportunity to read a good range of literature at all levels. Most subjects, especially history, geography and music, require students to undertake research for their project work at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, opportunities for wider reading in Key Stage 3 are limited and in some subjects are confined to worksheets. There are few opportunities for students to develop their reading skills in modern foreign languages. Most students are able to write for different purposes, providing brief or full answers, as circumstances require. There are ample opportunities for descriptive, discursive and report writing in art, physical education, information technology, geography and history. Students have opportunities for reflective writing in English and religious education. However, the work of many middle and lower attaining students is marred by inaccurate spelling, punctuation and grammar and teachers are inconsistent as to the extent they address this issue.

13. The levels of numeracy are good. Students in geography can calculate fractions accurately for use in pie charts, though in science some students do not set down calculations well. Good measuring skills are demonstrated in design and technology where students can estimate well when planning projects and they can weigh food competently. Graphical skills are good; higher attaining students in science can draw accurate graphs to represent energy release. Data handling skills are good. In geography students collect and analyse data well.

14. The school has set appropriate targets for the proportion of students achieving five or more passes at grades A\* to C, and has met its targets each year. The targets for 2000 demonstrate the expectation of a large improvement in GCSE results, with 60 per cent of students expected to achieve five or more passes at grades A\* to C. This target is appropriate given the above average standard of work observed during the inspection.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

15. Attendance is satisfactory. The attendance rate for 1998/9 was 92 per cent, which is close to the national average. Attendance in Years 7 to 11 is regularly above the benchmark figure of 90 per cent. There has been a slight decline in levels of attendance since the time of the last inspection. This is because a few students have had poor attendance due to medical or social problems and three students are travellers with very erratic attendance. Students are punctual to arrive at school in the mornings, apart from the occasional late bus. There are some delays to the start of lessons whilst students transfer between lessons because no time is allowed for movement.

16. Students' behaviour both around the site and in lessons is generally good, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. The school buildings are spread out on a large campus, which demands common-sense behaviour and orderliness, to which students respond well. They are courteous and helpful around the school. Parents are pleased with standards of behaviour. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last year and only a low number of fixed period exclusions. This is a considerable improvement on the rate of exclusions at the time of the previous inspection.

17. As at the time of the previous inspection, students have good attitudes towards school and their learning. The inspection found students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons

to be good in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form. Attitudes in lessons at Key Stage 4, whilst still satisfactory, are not quite as good. In some cases this is because a small minority students are not motivated, as they are not studying for an accredited qualification and in others because they are inherently disinterested or not appropriately challenged.

18. Students' personal qualities are well developed. Sixth formers help the younger students in their registration time or provide support as trained counsellors. House and sports captains play a responsible role in school life. Students show initiative in raising money, for instance to sponsor a link trip to Uganda. Students participate in school decision making through the school council. Students show respect for other viewpoints and religions in the personal and social education programme. Students show very good interest in school productions, extra curricular sports, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and the many residential visits and trips. Students from the boarding house are very well integrated into the life of the school and other students view their presence as a real asset in broadening their own horizons.

19. Relationships are good. Students relate very well to most of their teachers. Parents and students feel that the school is safe. Bullying is not a significant concern, but is handled swiftly and sensitively when it does occur.

#### **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

20. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form and promotes satisfactory learning throughout the school.

21. At Key Stages 3 and 4, teaching is satisfactory or better in around 93 per cent of lessons and good or better in 47 per cent. The main strengths lie in the way that teachers manage their classes and the effectiveness of the teaching methods, whilst there are weaknesses in the setting of homework and the marking of work. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is good in design and technology, English, mathematics, music and physical education and satisfactory in all other subjects. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is good in art, design and technology, English, geography, history and physical education and satisfactory in all other subjects. Although teaching and learning is satisfactory in information technology lessons, there are too few of them and the curriculum is not planned sufficiently to ensure that students are achieving satisfactory standards.

22. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed in the sixth form and 65 per cent of lessons were taught to a good or better standard. Around 25 per cent were very good or excellent. However, there is a weakness in the teaching in the sixth form that is observed in the scrutiny of work, rather than in individual lessons. The weakness lies in teachers' failure to always insist upon well organised notes and files. The strengths in teaching in the sixth form are the teachers' knowledge of the subject and the way that they manage students. Teaching is good in art, design and technology, geography, mathematics and physical education and satisfactory in all other subjects except religious education where the quality of teaching is excellent.

23. The quality of learning matches the quality of teaching in all subjects except art and religious education. In art at Key Stage 3, the quality of learning is good because the students are prepared to put a lot of extra effort into their practical work. In religious education, much of the teaching is carried out by non-specialists who do not have the depth of knowledge to be able to really extend students' understanding. This is off set, however, by the very good materials and guidance produced by the head of department and these materials allow students to achieve well. Elsewhere in the school, teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects are generally good. In geography, for example, the teachers have an excellent

understanding of the requirements of the GCSE syllabus and use this well to target the work in class at specific elements, supported by carefully chosen resources that meet exactly the requirements of the task. In the sixth form, many teachers are able to extend their students' understanding of the subject by asking increasingly more demanding questions that make the students think hard.

24. The teaching of skills such as numeracy and literacy is satisfactory overall, but varies significantly between subjects. There is no overall approach or policy on the teaching of literacy skills so practice is rather haphazard. So, for example, teachers in design and technology make good efforts to improve numeracy by insisting on accurate measurements, but do not ask students to produce extended written work. In the sixth form, the failure of teachers in some subjects to teach students how to organise their files leads to a degree of disorganisation and students do not have a sufficient basis from which to revise. This is most notable in chemistry and physics.

25. The expectations that teachers have of their students are generally satisfactory and they plan lessons that ensure students acquire new knowledge and skills at an appropriate pace. Classes are usually managed well and teachers make the most of students' good attitudes and behaviour to ensure that they maintain their concentration at a good level. The methods used by teachers tend to be more interesting to students at Key Stage 3 rather than in the rest of the school. Here, teachers tend to be more innovative and prepared to try out new ideas, rather than relying on tried and tested methods. The students respond with enthusiasm to such techniques as role-play in history or to the opportunities they have to use computers.

26. The teaching of students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory in many respects. Individual education plans are not in place for all students on the special educational needs register and those in place do not contain clear targets and are not sufficiently practical for teachers to implement when support staff are not present. For example, some targets simply say "improve". Students are therefore not able to make progress towards the targets that are set. Only some of the students following the Youth Award Scheme at Key Stage 4 are suitably challenged. For others on this course there is poor use of targets and students are not motivated to improve their performance. The special educational needs teacher has very good subject knowledge of the teaching of basic skills and this leads to confident teaching and the respect of students. However, learning support assistants, who withdraw students at Key Stage 3, often do not challenge students appropriately, make no use of assessment and do not make best use of the time and resources available. Learning support assistants who are attached to the mathematics and science departments, on the other hand, provide the right blend of help and challenge so that students do not become too dependent. Overall, teachers do not have sufficient guidance on how to address the specific needs of such students.

27. Most teachers set an appropriate amount of homework which is usually of a satisfactory quality at Key Stages 3 and 4. However, the timetable for setting the homework is not always adhered to leading to great variations in the amount that an individual student is set on a daily basis. On occasions, this can lead to students having no work to do at home for several days and then too many subjects to complete in a single evening. This variation was a cause of significant concern among parents. The problem does not exist in the sixth form because the number of subjects studied by an individual student is much smaller.

28. The other unsatisfactory characteristic of the teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4 is the quality and use of marking. The biggest drawback is the range of grades that are used by the different subjects. Students say, and the inspectors agree, that the different grades used to indicate attainment and effort are confusing so that do not know how well they are doing in

their subjects, either in relation to the national average or in relation to other students in the school. Some teachers failing to mark work properly exacerbate the problem. In science and modern foreign languages, for example, the marking of work does not always tell students what they need to do in order to improve, whilst in history some books have not been marked for several weeks. There is, however, good marking in English. There is inadequate assessment in information technology.

29. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the time of the previous inspection. In particular, the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3 has fallen from 17 per cent to nine per cent. The proportions of lessons taught to a satisfactory or better and good or better standard have increased at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form.

### **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?**

30. The curriculum is unsatisfactory as it fails to meet statutory requirements at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form.

31. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 has satisfactory breadth and balance and satisfies most of the requirements for the National Curriculum and religious education. In addition to the basic National Curriculum subjects, students also have lessons in drama and personal and social education. Students also study rural science in Years 7 and 8 and the majority learn two foreign languages in Years 8 and 9. The school aims to provide students with appropriate learning opportunities in information technology by teaching these skills within the other subjects of the curriculum. However, the planning is inadequate, students do not receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum programmes of study for information technology and the arrangements do not meet statutory requirements. The curriculum for information technology also lacks any coherence, in that there are insufficient opportunities for students to consolidate the new skills that they have learnt.

32. In Key Stage 4 students study the National Curriculum subjects, religious education and personal and social education. They also select additional subjects from a satisfactory range of options. This enables many students to follow a curriculum which has satisfactory breadth and balance. However, the arrangements for teaching information technology are the same as those in Key Stage 3 and similarly unsatisfactory, so that statutory requirements are not satisfied. There is a further weakness in the curriculum at this stage because sixteen students in each of Years 10 and 11 do not follow a course in a modern foreign language and have not been disapplied. This is a breach of National Curriculum requirements. These students are following a Youth Award course which is valuable in developing key skills and recognising personal achievement. However, this course is not vocational and does not in itself meet the requirements for providing a suitable alternative curriculum for students in Key Stage 4. The quality of the provision on this course is very variable with examples of good practice alongside poor quality provision.

33. The arrangements for teaching rural science in Key Stage 4 are unsatisfactory. Most students in the school follow a double award science course but a small number of lower attainers take the single award science course instead. These students then follow a rural science course in the remainder of the time allowed for science. Several students do not wish to study rural science and some have unsatisfactory attitudes to the subject, despite receiving satisfactory teaching. These students generally find science difficult and are now following another course which is related to both science and geography, the latter being one of the optional subjects at this stage. The use of the rural science course in this way represents a missed opportunity to allow these students to broaden their curriculum and to achieve in a different area. The rural science course presents a further weakness because it



is not equally available to all students; those who study double award science cannot also study rural science.

34. In both key stages there are satisfactory arrangements for teaching literacy within the various subjects, though this is more the result of efforts by individual departments rather than developing from whole school initiatives. There has been a recent working party associated with developing literacy. The teaching of numeracy skills is generally good across the curriculum.

35. The curriculum in the sixth form has several strengths but is unsatisfactory overall because it does not meet statutory requirements and, for some students, it does not provide relevant courses. There is a good range of A level courses and students also follow a programme of additional activities including physical education. Many students, therefore, are provided with a curriculum that meets their needs and has satisfactory breadth and balance. However, there is no compulsory religious education in the sixth form curriculum so it does not satisfy statutory requirements. There are opportunities for students to study photography and several other GCSE subjects, including child development. However, some students embark on A level courses for which they are either not suited or not adequately qualified in terms of their GCSE grades. These students sometimes fail to gain a qualification at the end of the course.

36. Students in all year groups have lessons in personal and social education, which include all the required components of health education, sex education and drugs awareness. The arrangements for personal and social education are satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection. These lessons are now taught on a rota basis with particular teachers teaching individual modules. The quality of teaching in the lessons is usually good. However there is only a short time available on the timetable for personal and social education and this restricts the depth of coverage of, for example, citizenship topics and the moral aspects of sex education.

37. The present arrangements for careers education and work experience are unsatisfactory. Within the personal and social education course there are short careers education modules in Years 10 and 11. The time for these modules is short and, because they are provided on a rota, not all students receive these lessons at the most appropriate stage in the year. In line with the new arrangements nationally, students in Key Stage 4 only automatically receive an individual interview with the careers advisor if a particular need is identified. There have been few initiatives within the school to compensate for this change and some students are concerned that they are not getting sufficient advice.

38. The work experience co-ordinator has worked hard and most effectively in her first year in the post; she has produced a valuable briefing document for students and an appropriate development strategy. However some of the preferred timings for the planning of work experience have had to be modified to fit in with other aspects of the personal and social education course and this has delayed students' applications and made placements more difficult to achieve. Responsibility for careers education, work experience and records of achievement is split between three different teachers with very little overall co-ordination. As a result there are few links between these three areas to ensure that students make the best possible progress in planning for their future careers, using work experience to inform their decisions and in compiling their records of achievement.

39. The school has good relationships with partner primary schools and there are effective arrangements for ensuring that students settle quickly and easily in this school at the beginning of Year 7. There are stimulating workshops, shared with other schools, in art and music and the work of the Advanced Skills Teacher provides a valuable link between this

school and others. There are good links between the English and mathematics departments and their colleagues in the primary schools to ensure that students' learning in these subjects continues smoothly when they move between schools. However such links are not equally effective in all subjects and students indicate that there is some repetition of topics they have studied in primary school, particularly in science and geography.

40. The school provides students with a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities and there are late buses on three nights each week to enable students who live some distance from the school to take a full part in the activities. There is a particular strength in the sporting activities which involve 10 members of staff and around a third of students in the school at some stage during the school year. Students, particularly those in Year 11, benefit from a satisfactory range of opportunities to gain extra study support. There is a very good programme of visits with a particularly wide range of residential opportunities. All these activities are highly valued by both students and their parents and provide worthwhile additional opportunities for students' learning and personal development.

41. The school has made satisfactory progress in developing its curriculum since the time of the previous inspection. The balance of the curriculum has improved and statutory requirements are now met in art, design and technology, science and religious education in Key Stages 3 and 4. However there is still no religious education in the sixth form. Extra curricular activities are now a major strength of the school.

42. The curriculum provision for students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory. Not all students with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. As well as receiving extra support in lessons, 40 students with special educational needs at Key Stage 3 are withdrawn from English and modern foreign languages and these arrangements make a difference to the curriculum students receive.

43. Students in Year 7 identified as having weak literacy skills are withdrawn from English three times a week on a termly rotational basis. In Years 8 and 9, students who are either not studying a foreign language or taking only one foreign language are taught in the learning support department twice weekly. A total of 40 students were withdrawn in Key Stage 3 on this basis at the time of the inspection. The withdrawal sessions staffed by teachers are effective, but those staffed by learning support assistants are of variable quality, and in the worst instances are very poor. There is one student in Year 8 and there are four students in Year 9 who do not receive their entitlement to a foreign language, but they are not formally disapplied from the National Curriculum.

44. At the time of the last report, there were good opportunities in the extra early morning classes; the needs of students with statements were met and there was effective use made of outside agencies; all of these are still in place. However, the majority of staff in the school are still not aware of the particular needs of students with special educational needs and the quality of learning and standards achieved by these students still lacks consistency across the curriculum. There is also still an absence of suitable, varied teaching strategies.

45. The school has not realised the potential of the individual education plan as the most important component of the school's special educational needs provision. It has not developed its procedures and practices sufficiently since the time of the last inspection. Individual education plans are less than 12 months old and staff are still in the developmental phase regarding true implementation of the spirit of the Code of Practice.

46. The school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. There have been improvements in all aspects since the previous inspection.

47. The provision for spiritual development remains unsatisfactory. There has been a significant improvement in religious education where students are given opportunities to gain an understanding of how values, beliefs and life-style are linked and to develop their own system of beliefs and values. However the only other subject which makes a significant contribution is art where much of the work has a spiritual dimension. Recently the school has analysed schemes of work across the curriculum but this has not yet resulted in explicit work addressing spiritual development in most subjects. There is no provision of religious education for the majority of sixth form students and many other students are taught by teachers whose knowledge and experience of religious education limits their ability to draw out fully the spiritual dimensions of the topics which they are teaching. Some assemblies are broadly Christian in character and constitute acts of collective worship. However these are limited in number and frequency and the school does not therefore comply with statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

48. The provision for students' moral development is good. The ethos of the school is made clear to students through a statement of intent and code of expected behaviour displayed in each classroom. On entry to the school students sign a home/school agreement and this is confirmed when students enter the sixth form. These, along with consistent expectations of good behaviour by staff, ensure that students know what the school regards as right and wrong. It is clear that students are trusted and they can therefore develop their own self-discipline within a safe and ordered environment. Specific elements of the personal and social education programme and religious education address moral issues and other contributions to the provision are made by geography, history, modern foreign languages and science. The latter challenges students to consider issues such as the rights and wrongs of building a reservoir in a specific location. Themes in assemblies also develop students' understanding of good and bad and help them to develop their system of values.

49. The school's provision for students' social development is good. There is a significant amount of collaborative work across the curriculum which develops students' ability to build successful working relationships, notably in music, science and geography. There is very good team work in physical education and representative sport and recently there has been a very successful team initiative in design and technology where a group of staff and students won a national competition to build and race a remote controlled car. Personal relationships are covered well in personal and social education and religious education. A strength of the school is the ambitious programme of residential experiences in this country and abroad. Some of these involve only a limited number of older students but there are also easily accessible experiences such as adventure courses and a school camp for younger students. These attract large numbers. The arrangements for students' dining at lunchtime

involve lengthy and heavily supervised queuing and a poor social environment. The school has plans to improve these facilities immediately after the inspection.

50. There are opportunities for sixth form students to take responsibility. These include the posts of head boy and girl and their deputies, student counsellors and team captains. Some students act as “reading buddies” assisting Year 7 students with their reading and Year 12 students are involved with work experience and a common room committee. Students in the sixth form also visit local primary schools to act as role models for younger pupils. The scope is more limited for younger students but there are many opportunities for them to choose to be involved in extra-curricular activities and all students take part in two weeks’ work experience. A valuable feature in a school serving a scattered rural community is the provision of transport at the conclusion of after-school activities. A flourishing Duke of Edinburgh Award programme gives opportunities for students to develop initiative and self reliance. A weaker side of the provision is the absence, until very recently, of a school council or other channel through which students in the main school can have a voice in its development.

51. Students are introduced to their responsibilities as citizens through history where they examine democracy and electoral systems and through other subjects and special events which explore such issues as the care of the environment and planning. There are some links with local community initiatives such as an art group designing murals for a local water board installation. A feature of the school is its work in environmental science and on the school farm. A number of sixth form students are involved in United Nations projects, Young Enterprise companies, public speaking events and there are examples of very successful charity work.

52. The provision for students’ cultural development is good. They study their own cultural traditions in art, drama, English and music and this experience is enriched through visits to theatres and art galleries in this country and as far afield as New York. There have been visits by artists in residence and school productions that provide experience in art, dance, drama and music. There is a lively programme of musical activities which includes close cooperation with contributory primary schools and an annual residential experience. Although the school environment does not celebrate this country’s multicultural society many subjects introduce students to other cultures and religious faiths, notably, art, design technology, English, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music and religious education. There is an extensive programme of regular visits to and correspondence with Europe and less frequent opportunities to visit more distant countries such as Australia, Canada and the USA. The well-established exchange link with a school in Uganda directly involves a small number of older students and indirectly the whole school community through visits to partner primary schools, an African arts week and concerts in the town and the further afield. Curriculum links are also established and the link with Uganda therefore makes a major contribution to students’ multicultural education. Boarders include students from abroad and their well-integrated presence enhances the experience of other students.

## HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

53. The school provides good pastoral care for students. Parents find the school approachable and caring. Tutors and heads of year provide good continuity of pastoral care. Students feel confident in the support they are given and relationships are good.

54. Arrangements to ensure students' welfare are satisfactory. Procedures for child protection are good; they follow recognised LEA guidelines and written guidelines for staff have been improved since the last inspection. The school has appropriately detailed health and safety guidelines. Nevertheless, there is a need to formalise the procedures for risk assessment and recording. There is no risk assessment in place in physical education. The school has partly addressed the health and safety issues from the last report, but there are still uneven flagstones, particularly on the sloped areas. The fencing around the unused swimming pool is not secure.

55. The recording of attendance conforms to statutory requirements. Attendance is monitored satisfactorily by the matron and heads of year, who take appropriate steps to chase unexplained absences. The Educational Welfare Service provides good support and make home visits to those students who are most in need of improving their attendance.

56. There are good systems in place for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. Parents praised the school's efforts in developing good attitudes and particularly mentioned the commendation letters, awards for effort, the school council and the sixth form. There are improved channels of communication to support effective monitoring of behaviour. These systems still need further refinement, for example to track and avoid clashing subject detentions for the same lunch time. These detentions are used well, however, and strict attention is paid to giving a detention to any student who has not completed homework on time. This has led to students having a very good attitude to completion of homework. Better arrangements are needed to ensure that students given a senior staff detention can have some lunch. Teachers are generally consistent in achieving good standards of behaviour management in their classes and set good role models.

57. Teachers deal with any cases of bullying firmly and effectively. Students express confidence in the system and report that there is relatively little bullying at the school.

58. The school satisfactorily supports and monitors students' personal development. Form tutors and class teachers know their charges well. Students are able to play an active part in school life and decision making. The programme of social education helps students to become mature and responsible. The administrator for work experience is developing first class systems and support for students' work experience in Years 10 and 12. Timetable constraints and lack of communication though hamper the totality of work experience preparation. Some parents were concerned about the careers advice given to students for the sixth form before choosing A levels. The inspectors agree with this. Careers education is too fragmented. There is a lack of co-ordination between the record of achievement work, work experience, careers education and the role of the tutors. This adversely effects students' preparation for the next stage of education or the world of work.

59. The procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are satisfactory but the use made of assessment information to guide curricular planning is unsatisfactory. The school's assessment policy provides a framework within which assessment takes place, but even so there are inconsistencies as to how effectively departments assess students' progress.

60. Subject departments are responsible for producing the annual assessment grade for each student and for making other assessments of attainment. In most subjects these assessments are accurate and manageable. The exceptions are information technology, where procedures for assessing the development of skills across the curriculum are poor; music, where the assessment criteria used at the end of Key Stage 3 are not related to National Curriculum Levels and physical education, where assessment criteria are not identified. Whilst departments make their annual assessment of students' progress, in Key Stage 3 they use different ways of indicating levels of attainment, some using National Curriculum descriptors and others using a system of grades. This creates some difficulties for students and their parents in understanding to what extent students are achieving in individual subjects and in being able to make comparisons about students' attainment in different subjects. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form attainment is described in relation to public examination grades and is understood well.

61. Besides issuing annual reports on students' attainment and progress, the school also conducts "academic reviews" of classes during the terms when reports are not issued. The information is used together with data gained from monitoring and interviews. The process is thorough and does help staff to identify individuals who may need additional help or supervision. However, other than in the sixth form, only effort grades are recorded and so no clear indication is given as to how a student is performing in relation to his prior attainment or potential.

62. The effectiveness with which departments use assessment data to guide their curriculum planning is variable. In mathematics, geography and design and technology it is good, in most other subjects it is satisfactory, in physical education and in music at Key Stage 3 it is unsatisfactory and in information technology it is poor. In Key Stage 3 the lack of comparability of grades between different subjects creates difficulties in monitoring the progress of individuals or groups of students and setting targets for them. Following on from the academic reviews, action plans are drawn up for individual students. The school has also recently started to produce individual educational plans for students on its special needs register. However, both types of plans are superficial and do not set targets, a timetable for improvement or provide monitoring criteria. The school analyses examination results and the information available is used to set targets for GCSE and A level. However, it is not being used to guide students in their choice of sixth form courses, either in the school or elsewhere, with the result that some students embark upon courses which are unsuitable for them.

63. The school identifies well those students with special educational needs and these students are placed at the appropriate stage on the register of students with special educational needs.

64. Individual education plans are not in place for all students at stages 2 to 5 of the register. Individual education plans do exist for the majority of students on the special educational needs register but they lack rigour and depth. This leads to them being largely irrelevant when addressing the individual needs of students. They do not focus on the specific learning difficulties of the student; they do not take account of what the student has already achieved; have no clear targets to be achieved over a specific period of time; and neither the student nor parent are involved in the individual education plan's preparation and review.

65. Form tutors currently write the targets for students at stages 2 and 3 of the register. These targets are imprecise and do not clarify what is to be done in the immediate, short-term to facilitate progress. For example, “improve”, “read more” or “try harder”. There are no subject specific targets and review dates are meaningless. As a result of this individual education plans are not used effectively in the classroom to ensure that individual needs are addressed. There are no behaviour individual education plans even though students have been identified as having behaviour problems.

### ***The arrangements for boarding***

66. There is very good quality provision for the students who live in the boarding accommodation. Currently there are 88 boarders, 35 girls and 53 boys, who all attend the school. 14 students board on a weekly basis and the rest termly. Residents’ backgrounds are diverse, but the majority are from families in the armed forces and there is a smaller group of students with families in Hong Kong. All students are British nationals.

67. The number of applications for boarding places outstrips the number of available places. The school allocates places on a ‘first come first served basis’, but does not yet have a written admissions policy to cater for conflicting priorities.

68. The boarding accommodation is attractively situated about ten minutes walk from the school. It is clean, warm and well maintained. Daily routines are well planned and appropriate. There are supervised study periods for younger students and suitable routines for individual study for older students. Students are rightly pleased with the good range of social opportunities and group outings, which offer a suitable personal freedom of choice. For example the older students can catch the bus into Oxford at the weekends. Residents of all ages accept the sensible limits that are placed on their outings. There are sensible rules to ensure a good social environment. Sanctions, which include ‘grounding’, are applied fairly and there is no evidence of any anti social behaviour.

69. The school has responded well to the recommendations in the last report. There is increased security on the windows. Library provision has been upgraded and is now adequate. The accommodation has been improved and the girls’ bathrooms refurbished. Students have adequate access to computers for their homework, though there are no Internet and email facilities in the house, which would provide a useful home link for students. The accommodation has no major health and safety concerns.

70. There is a good level of adult supervision in the boarding house at all times and a high degree of pastoral and personal care. The deputy head is the senior resident in charge of the boarding house and is efficiently assisted by his wife, who is the bursar. There is a house mistress, three matrons and a rota of male and female house tutors to carry out evening duties. A pastoral diary ensures good continuity of care.

71. There is a family-like atmosphere in the house. The accommodation needs for different ages are well catered for. Students help with duties at the weekends as well as regular daily help with clearing up after meals. The dining facilities are good. The food is healthy and well cooked with a choice of a hot dish or salad. Students sit at arranged tables for dinner during the week. This helps to ensure easy socialisation across year and friendship groups.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

72. The school has good links with parents, which support learning. Parents' views in the pre inspection meeting with the Registered Inspector and in the questionnaire were predominantly positive. Parents are pleased with the standards of education. They find that the school is approachable and listens to their views. Many parents commented favourably on changes at the school since the arrival of the current headteacher.

73. Parents expressed some concerns over the information they receive on progress and uneven homework provision. The inspectors agree with parents' positive views and their views on improvements.

74. This year the usual interim meeting with form tutors for Year 7 parents was not held. This oversight impaired the communication of progress information to the parents of Year 7 children. The annual written reports on students' progress vary in quality. In some reports there is no clear indication of attainment or information on what students have achieved. The different grading systems used for attainment are confusing. Whilst most reports do give broadly satisfactory information on the child's progress, information technology and personal and social education are not reported and this makes the overall provision of information to parents unsatisfactory.

75. The parents of students with special educational needs are unable to contribute fully to their child's learning at school and at home. Not all parents are involved in identifying their child's needs, nor in providing appropriate support, and not all parents are involved in regular reviews of their child's progress.

76. The home/school contract is working successfully. Parents support for the school, work at home and for the value of education have a positive effect on students' learning. The Burford School Association arranges popular social events, some curriculum discussion evenings and has helped purchase the school minibus. The school covenant has funded software for learning support. Parents help with exam invigilation and residential trips and visits. The parents are very supportive of their children's learning in the way in which they use the student record book. These are most effective in ensuring that parents can monitor a range of criteria related to their child's performance, such as attendance and homework. They carry out this role diligently.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

77. The leadership and management of the school are now good. There have been significant improvements in this area since the time of the previous inspection. The current headteacher was appointed at a difficult point in the school's history. Staff morale was low, students were underachieving and the number on roll was falling. Parents felt that they were being kept uninformed about events taking place at the school and the governors had been spending much of their time dealing with internal issues related to management.

78. Since the appointment of the current headteacher, the decline in standards has been reversed and the school now has a headteacher who is providing very clear direction for the school by ensuring that its aims and values are implemented. The main priorities for development, particularly the morale of the staff, were accurately identified and the effectiveness of the actions taken to address them is clear in the rising standards at Key Stage 3 where results are now well above the national average. The staff are now pulling together with a good level of shared commitment to improving both the quality of education that they provide and the standards that are achieved by the students. Parents, too, comment on the improved management and leadership since the arrival of the current headteacher.



79. Many staff in posts of responsibility, particularly those on the senior management team, also provide good leadership. In particular, the management of the boarding house has been most effective and has rejuvenated the facility. However, there are significant weaknesses in the management of information technology and special educational needs, which lead to students failing to make satisfactory progress.

80. The governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and were particularly strong in dealing with the school's underperformance at the time of the previous inspection. Since that time, they have supported the new headteacher but have not been afraid to question developments and have taken a firm stance on such issues as reducing the curriculum in the sixth form. In this way they are playing a good part in shaping the school's future. However, their effectiveness in terms of meeting the school's statutory requirements is poor. The full National Curriculum is not taught to all students in information technology and modern foreign languages; there is no provision for religious education in the sixth form; parents do not receive a copy of a report on their child's progress in information technology or personal and social education; there has been no risk assessment in physical education; the frequency of acts of collective worship do not meet requirements; the reporting of examination results is misleading and there is information missing from the prospectus and annual report of the Governing Body. Overall, therefore, the effectiveness of the governing body in fulfilling its responsibilities is unsatisfactory.

81. The school's systems for monitoring and evaluating its performance, diagnosing its strengths and weaknesses and taking effective action to secure improvements are satisfactory. The school focuses its monitoring of teaching on specific groups of students. So that members of the senior management team will track a group of higher attainers or underachieving boys, for example. This system has considerable benefits in that it can pinpoint what is working well and where the failings are for such students. This is supported by the very good systems for appraisal and performance management, which include regular classroom observations and formal feedback linked to targets for improvement. The system is less effective at a departmental level where the quality of monitoring and the ability to share good practice tends to vary with the head of department. For example, there is good support in English, where there have been significant improvements in teaching and dramatic improvements in results, but in science monitoring is carried out by popping in and out of classrooms and is not effective. The results of analyses of examination data are used appropriately, but the school is only just starting to develop systems for using assessment data to track the progress of individuals and relate it to the quality of teaching that they receive.

82. The quality of development planning is good at a whole school level with carefully identified priorities, supported by clear strategies for improvement. Responsibilities are made clear and the criteria that are used to judge success are appropriately demanding, particularly in terms of GCSE results. The situation at a departmental level shows the same variation as is observed in the quality of monitoring. Some departments, such as religious education, demonstrate a clear emphasis on improving standards, whilst others, such as drama, tend to concentrate on improving resources.

83. The quality of financial planning in the school is good and the school applies appropriately the principles of best value. The school raises considerable sums through its own efforts, such as running a caravan park, and manages to bring its income up to the national average. The school's priorities are supported well through the financial planning and prudent decisions are made over the use of funds in order to obtain best value. For example, the school overspent by a relatively small amount last year in order to take advantage of a deal whereby the school spent £8000 on refurbishing classrooms and the local education authority added an additional £12000. The school is taking over the management of the school meals on the day after the inspection. This is in order to address the deficiencies it has identified in, for example, the time that students spend waiting for lunch and the concerns raised by parents, whilst improving the financial benefit to the school. The school makes good use of the grants that it receives for specific purposes, such as the recent government initiative to increase the number of text books in schools. The day to day running of the school is efficient and the school makes appropriate use of new technology.

84. The school has sufficient rooms to meet the requirements of the curriculum. Most subjects are appropriately resourced, although the software is rather dated and leads to time being lost in lessons while it is loaded. There are shortages of text books in modern foreign languages and geography which lead to problems with homework and the development of atlas skills. The school has sufficient staff to meet its requirements, but they do not match the requirements of the curriculum. There are not enough specialist teachers of religious education and the school is unable to staff a religious education course in the sixth form.

85. The arrangements for the professional development of staff are very good. There is a strong commitment to the development and training of staff. The school has recently received the 'Investors in People' award. Teachers are appraised annually. Training is well planned and is linked to school and department development plans and to individual need. A review of the training received is reported to governors annually. Good support is provided for newly qualified teachers and staff new to the school and it is well planned through the school's induction programme.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

86. In order to improve the standards reached by students and the quality of education that the school provides, the school should:

- (1) Improve the progress made by students with special educational needs by:
  - Ensuring that all students on stages 2 to 5 of the register of special educational needs have individual education plans that clearly identify targets for improvement and the time scale in which such improvement is to take place; (paragraph 64)
  - Improving the quality of teaching in lessons taught by learning support assistants; (paragraph 26)
  - Providing better guidance to teachers on the use of individual education plans; (paragraph 26)
  - Ensuring full access to the National Curriculum in modern foreign languages. (paragraph 43)
  
- (2) Improve the progress made by students in information technology by:
  - Ensuring that the National Curriculum is taught to all students; (paragraph 31)
  - Providing sufficient opportunities for students to consolidate their skills; (paragraph 31)
  - Assessing students' progress and using the information gained to plan subsequent lessons. (paragraph 60)
  
- (3) Improve the standards achieved in the sixth form by ensuring that students are placed on appropriate courses. (paragraph 10)

In addition to these main areas for improvement, the following, less important, weaknesses need to be considered:

- Meeting all statutory requirements; (paragraph 80)
- Improving the information for parents; (paragraph 74)
- Paying greater attention to the homework timetable; (paragraph 27)
- Improving the quality of the school's provision for students' spiritual development. (paragraph 47)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	205
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	64

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	13	35	44	4	1	1

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

### Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y13
Number of students on the school's roll	1035
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	66

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y13
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	20
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	152

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	19

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	322
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	41

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	7.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.0
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	72	83	155

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	51	50	48
	Girls	76	60	64
	Total	127	110	112
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (78)	71 (72)	73 (69)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	45 (45)	51 (44)	33 (37)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	41	52	52
	Girls	70	68	68
	Total	111	120	120
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (68)	78 (81)	78 (70)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	48 (38)	56 (60)	40 (32)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	90	84	174

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	41	77	82
	Girls	44	76	80
	Total	85	153	162
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	49 (53)	88 (91)	93 (98)
	National	46.3 (43.3)	90.7 (88.5)	95.7 (94.0)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	39 (40.1)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	46	48	94

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	12.6	15.4	14.0 (15.6)	0.4	1.0	0.7 (2.7)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.1)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.7)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	8.4
	National	10.2

### **Ethnic background of students**

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	1
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	13
White	1005
Any other minority ethnic group	10

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	6	0
Other minority ethnic groups		

*This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of students excluded.*

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	59.7
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.3

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	620

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.4
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	27
Key Stage 4	21

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1998/1999
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	£
Total income	2 328 597
Total expenditure	2 394 793
Expenditure per student	2 328
Balance brought forward from previous year	22 724
Balance carried forward to next year	(43 472)

*Figures in parenthesis indicate negative values*

## **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1620
Number of questionnaires returned	592

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	49	7	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	43	50	3	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	52	4	1	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	52	18	4	3
The teaching is good.	29	58	5	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	47	17	4	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	52	42	2	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	38	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	26	53	15	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	46	44	2	0	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	48	5	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	42	44	8	1	6



## **PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

### **ENGLISH**

87. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests the proportions of students attaining level five and above and level six and above were both well above the national average. The average National Curriculum points score attained in 1999 was well above the national average both for all schools and for similar schools. The performance of girls was better than that of boys. Results fell in 1997 and have been rising ever since. Results in 1999 were better than those in mathematics and science.

88. In 1999 the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A\* to C in English was above the national average and the proportion attaining grades A\* to G was below the national average. In English literature the proportion attaining grades A\* to C was in line with the national average. Results have been similar over the past three years, the exception being 1998 when the proportion of students attaining grades A\* to C in English literature dipped to below the national average. The performance of girls was better than that of boys in 1999. Students gained better results in English than they gained in most of the other subjects that they studied. Results at A level in 1999 were close to the national average, as they have been for the past three years.

89. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that attainment at Key Stage 3 is above the national average, rather than well above as would be suggested by the results in the national tests last year. This does not indicate a drop in standards achieved but is part of a pattern of results that fluctuate from year to year according to the prior attainment of the particular group of students. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the 1999 examination results accurately reflect standards being currently attained. When their prior attainment is taken into account, students' achievement is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and is satisfactory in the sixth form.

90. Students' attainment in speaking and listening is a clear strength throughout the school. Most students enjoy taking part in oral work and do so confidently. They take part in whole class, group and paired discussions and hold the interest of their listeners by using a lively and varied vocabulary. Higher and middle attainers possess a good vocabulary and can use language flexibly. Lower attainers often express themselves briefly and assert ideas rather than explain them. As they move up the school students become more skilled at participating in debates. Thus, for example, a group of Year 11 students were seen vigorously discussing possible alternative interpretations of poems from the GCSE anthology, and being willing to challenge both each other and their teacher. They listened carefully when others spoke and drew upon evidence from the text to support their views.

91. By the age of 14 students read novels and poems appropriate for their age group. Higher attainers read aloud with clarity and fluency, though a significant proportion do not acquire the quality of expression or capacity to project their voices to the extent that might be expected. Most students understand what they read and, in some lessons, display a depth of understanding. In a Year 9 lesson on "Romeo and Juliet", for example, students had already learned how to examine exactly what words meant in a given context and were able to use this skill in explaining how Shakespeare presented the relationship between Juliet and her mother. By the age of 16 and 19 students go on to read more demanding texts. In doing so, they display insight into how writers present social themes and create character. This was seen, for example, when in a Year 11 lesson on John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" students were able to appreciate the complexity of the friendship between the two main characters and were able to anticipate and account for the unusual ending of the novel.

However, only the highest attainers are able to analyse in close detail the effectiveness of language. In the sixth form, students do not develop their interest and personal taste in reading to the extent that might be expected. Lower attaining students mostly confine themselves to the gist of what they read rather than engaging directly with the text.

92. By the age of 14 students understand how to write for a good range of audiences, including poems, narratives and reports. A particularly good feature of some students' work is their capacity to improve their writing by re-drafting it, though the extent to which they develop the routine varies from class to class and depends upon the emphasis placed upon it by the teacher. By the age of 16 students widen the scope of their writing to include, for example, discursive writing and writing for a clearly defined purpose. Very good quality writing was seen, for example, in the style of a director writing to an actress trying to persuade her to join the cast of a play. Good quality, varied writing is also produced by middle and some lower attaining students. Examples were seen in essays on media topics, which involved gathering and presenting considerable quantities of information, and in successful attempts to write in the style of Edgar Alan Poe. By the age of 19 students are able to assemble their ideas well and to argue a case with clarity. However, only the highest attainers are able to evaluate the use of language successfully. The work of some middle and many lower attaining students is marred by inaccurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.

93. The quality of teaching and learning is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and it is satisfactory in the sixth form. When teaching is most effective, teachers display very good subject knowledge. This arouses the interest of students, who feel they can probe their teacher further to increase their own knowledge and understanding. This was seen, for example, in a Year 10 class on "Macbeth". The teacher drew upon his own understanding of the text of the play and the historical period to explain features of Roman Polanski's film of the play. This in turn led to a discussion of other aspects of the production, during which students' skills as critical viewers notably developed. Good teaching of basic skills leads to students becoming more self-critical and understanding how to improve their work. This was seen, for example, in a Year 8 class for which the teacher provided detailed and helpful guidance on how written work might be improved by re-drafting, and this in turn led to many students becoming meticulous in checking their work. Good quality planning, which takes into account the prior attainment of students, results in the work being suitably challenging for all students in the class. Most lessons contain variety and are conducted at a good pace, which results in students remaining attentive and behaving well. When teaching is less effective, teachers' planning does not adequately take into account students' prior attainment and this results in higher attaining students not being challenged and some students with special educational needs not receiving appropriate support. Independent education plans, provided for students with special educational needs, are often vague and do not set targets or a timetable for improvement. Thus, whilst overall students in Key Stages 3 and 4 make good progress, students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

94. In some lessons seen at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, whilst students are given good opportunities to discuss ideas in class, they are not required to consolidate their understanding by writing down in a full and coherent form what they have studied. As a consequence, middle and lower attaining students do not develop their skills in writing to the extent that might be expected. In some of the units of study in the sixth form, insufficient emphasis is placed upon supported self-study to encourage students to become independent learners and occasionally the resources provided for lessons restrict rather than widen horizons. When information technology is used in lessons, teaching and progress is good. Overall, however, students do not have sufficient access to information technology to enable them to develop the level of skills that might be expected. This is mainly because of limited resources.

95. Across the whole curriculum students' skills in literacy are broadly in line with the national expectation, though their skills in speaking and listening are above it. In most subjects students have the chance to take part in a variety of speaking activities, including whole class and group discussion on such topics as how the coast might be protected in geography or what it feels like to belong to a minority group in English. Students also develop the range of their skills by participating in role-play in drama and history. For example, a group of Key Stage 4 students were seen re-creating "The Big Three" Yalta Conference of 1945. In most subjects students are taught, and practice using, appropriate subject-specific terms. Thus many students are relatively articulate speakers and attentive listeners. Opportunities for students to develop their reading skills are more variable. In English students do have the opportunity to read a good range of literature at all levels. Most subjects, especially history, geography and music, require students to undertake research for their project work at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, opportunities for wider reading in Key Stage 3 are limited and in some subjects, such as design technology, are confined to worksheets. There are few opportunities for students to develop their reading skills in modern foreign languages. Most students are able to write for different purposes, providing brief or full answers, as circumstances require. There are ample opportunities for descriptive, discursive and report writing in art, physical education, information technology, geography and history. Students have opportunities for reflective writing in English and religious education. In the latter, for example, they cover such topics as "My Creed" in Year 7 and in Year 9 they write a personal response to the holocaust. However, the work of many middle and lower attaining students is marred by inaccurate spelling, punctuation and grammar and teachers are inconsistent as to the extent they address this issue.

96. Progress since the last inspection has been good in English. Overall, results have improved. The quality of teaching and learning has improved from "sound to good" to good. However, it remains the case that some of the work needs to be better suited to students' differing levels of ability. Progress in developing an effective literacy strategy has been satisfactory. There are now more opportunities for reflective and creative writing.

## **MATHEMATICS**

97. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, the proportion of students achieving level five and above was above the national average and the proportion achieving level six and above was well above the national average. The average points score achieved was well above the national average for all schools and for schools taking students from similar backgrounds. In the past, boys have achieved better results than girls at this stage but in 1999 girls performed better than the boys did. Results in mathematics in 1999 were similar to those in science but not as good as those in English. Test results in mathematics have been consistently above the national average for the last four years and are now further above average than they were in 1996.

98. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students gaining grades A\* to C was above the national average and the proportion gaining grades A\* to G matched the national average. Boys achieved significantly better results than girls did but both boys and girls achieved better results in mathematics than they did in their other subjects. Results in the 1999 A level examinations were close to the national average, as they had been in previous years. Overall, students achieve well, given their levels of prior attainment, at Key Stage 3 and achieve satisfactory standards at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

99. In the work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the ages of 14 and 16 are better than those expected for students of the same age nationally. These standards reflect the attainment in recent GCSE examination results, but are slightly lower than those suggested by the results of the national tests because of differences in the prior attainment of the students in different years. Students have at least satisfactory knowledge of the topics they are studying and many have better understanding than expected for their age. There are, however, a number of more able students in Year 11 who are not achieving the standards they should because of their unsatisfactory attitude to lessons. Students generally handle numbers reasonably well though many turn too readily to their calculators for simple calculations and some average attaining students still have difficulty with the order in which to carry out different calculations. Not enough guidance is given in science with setting down calculations for physical processes. Most students are able to measure accurately and demonstrated competent measuring skills when weighing food in design technology. Students of all levels of attainment have good skills in drawing graphs and they are able to use them well in geography to draw a variety of graphs. Higher attaining students can use this knowledge to plot graphs of algebraic functions and draw sketch graphs related to physical situations. Students are able to explain their work well when solving problems and can identify patterns and rules, with many able to produce appropriate formulae.

100. In the current Year 13, standards match those expected nationally for students following A level courses. For example, students have already acquired a good understanding of forces, energy and power and are able to apply the appropriate formulae to physical situations. They are also able to recall the different techniques for calculating probabilities. Students can apply their knowledge of statistical methods to hypothesis testing and sampling.

101. The quality of teaching and learning is good at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and explain skills and concepts carefully. They make the aims of the lesson clear so that students know what they are expected to learn. Teachers provide appropriate learning activities for students of all levels of attainment and students with special educational needs are enabled to make progress that matches that of other students. When teaching is very good, students learn quickly and efficiently because teachers plan the activities well. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, with students of varying ability, the teacher made full use of activities at different levels to ensure that students were able to increase their understanding of angles. In the occasional lesson where teaching is unsatisfactory, students are not given enough opportunity to show what they know and understand and are not made aware of how well they are doing. The marking of students' work is unsatisfactory. Some teachers mark student' books well though others do not give clear information to students about what they need to do to improve, leading to students being unaware of how well they are achieving or how to achieve higher standards.

102. The mathematics department is well led and managed. The head of department is providing a clear direction with an emphasis on raising standards. Teachers work well together as a team and there is a clear aim to raise students' attainment. Reports to parents, however, do not provide adequate information about what students can and can't do and what they need to do to improve their standards.

103. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades in the GCSE examination has improved significantly. The quality of teaching they receive is better than it was at that time with the questioning of students, and the activities provided, better suited to increasing the pace of students' learning. Students in Years 7 and 8 no longer achieve standards below that which would be expected of them.

## **SCIENCE**

104. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, the proportions of students at the age of 14 achieving level five and above and level six and above were well above both the national average and the average for schools taking students from similar backgrounds. Girls did better than boys in 1999 but boys have done better on average over the last four years. Results in science in 1999 were similar to those in mathematics but not as good as those in English. Test results in science have been above the national average for the last four years and have improved, relative to the national average, since 1996. In the 1999 GCSE double award science examination, the proportion of students gaining grades A\* to C was above the national average but in single award science the proportion gaining those grades was well below average. Overall, the proportion of students gaining grades A\* to C in science was slightly below the national average and below average for similar schools. Boys and girls achieved similar examination results. Students' results in double award science were not as good as those that they achieved in most other subjects that they studied. In the 1999 A level examinations, results in biology and chemistry were average and those in physics were below average. Results in environmental science were very low.

105. In the work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are better than those expected for students of the same age nationally. Standards at the age of 16 match those expected nationally. Students generally have at least satisfactory knowledge of the topics they are studying and higher attainers have better understanding than expected for their age. For example, some students in Key Stage 3 have very good knowledge of the composition and functions of the blood and make appropriate use of specialist terms more often introduced in Key Stage 4. In middle attaining groups, students do not always present calculations with sufficient care and in lower attaining groups there is often a shortage of detail in students' recall of earlier topics. Students' attainment in investigative work, as indicated by their own accounts in Key Stage 3 and examination grades in Key Stage 4, is broadly in line with their attainment in other aspects of science.

106. In the current Year 12 and Year 13, standards are broadly in line with those expected nationally for students following A level courses in biology, chemistry and physics. However there are some weaknesses. In chemistry, some boys do not organise their files sufficiently so that their notes are not as useful as they should be for revision. In physics, many Year 13 students do not have satisfactory understanding of some sections of the 'waves' topic.

107. Students in the current Key Stage 3 entered the school with levels of attainment which were above average and their attainment by the end of the key stage is similarly above the levels expected nationally. However students achieve better results than might be expected in the National Curriculum tests. Students in Key Stage 4 had lower attainment on entry to the school than more recent cohorts and their achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 is also satisfactory. Students in the sixth form who enter the A level science courses with appropriate levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 generally achieve satisfactorily in A level examinations. However, those who begin the courses with relatively low GCSE grades often make unsatisfactory progress. These students do not receive sufficient advice to ensure that they do not embark on A level courses in which they have little realistic chance of gaining a qualification.

108. Despite the broadly satisfactory achievement by students in both key stages and in the sixth form, some parents are dissatisfied with students' achievements in A level physics and chemistry and in the physics and chemistry topics in Key Stage 4. There is considerable justification for their concern in physics and there is some under-achievement in the subject. There have been problems with long term absence of a physics specialist and difficulties in finding satisfactory supply cover. Currently, some physics is being taught by teachers without a specialist qualification and in some of these lessons the teaching is either unsatisfactory or has weaknesses, because the teachers do not understand the subject in sufficient depth. In chemistry, the teaching is broadly satisfactory but some students have negative attitudes to the subject. The department is not paying sufficient attention to identifying the styles of learning that students prefer and ensuring that students' needs and preferences are fully met in this aspect of the science curriculum.

109. The quality of teaching and learning in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form is satisfactory overall. Most teachers have sound knowledge of their subject and plan lessons carefully. In particular, they usually provide students with clear, detailed notes which, particularly in Key Stage 3, provide a sound basis for students' revision and contribute to the very good test results at the end of Year 9. Teachers manage students effectively so that, in most lessons, students behave well and maintain concentration at a satisfactory level. Teachers provide effective briefings at the beginning of a lesson so that students know what they have to do in the practical work which follows. However, in some lessons, the introduction does not place enough emphasis on the underlying scientific principles to ensure that students keep these in mind while they are working. The most common weakness, in lessons that are otherwise satisfactory, is a slightly slow pace. In these circumstances, students remain quiet and well behaved but their attention wanders and they do not learn as effectively as they should. A similar situation arises when teachers do not question students sufficiently to ensure that they understand what is being said. In some lessons teachers provide a good range of activities to keep students involved in the lesson. For example, in a Year 11 revision lesson on food webs and energy flow, there was a short question and answer session to consolidate basic ideas, a video tape from which students extracted the meanings of words, an example of a food web to consider as a class exercise, an examination question and basic notes on key words; students were constantly moving on to the next activity and continually reinforcing basic ideas. However, in other lessons, single activities are allowed to go on for longer than necessary. Some teachers mark students' work carefully and thoroughly but marking is unsatisfactory overall because some of it does not clearly inform students about how well they have done or indicate what they need to do to improve.

110. Students with all levels of attainment are usually enabled to learn at a satisfactory pace. In some lessons students learn quickly. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, all students made good progress in setting up, and measuring the currents in, parallel circuits. Students with special educational needs are usually effectively supported by both the teacher and, where appropriate, the support assistant and are enabled to make similar progress to that of others in the group. Higher attaining students also make satisfactory progress in most situations. However, in some lessons for the mixed ability groups in Year 7, the highest attainers do not make as much progress as they should because work they have studied, and fully understood, in their primary schools is repeated.

111. The head of department is keen to move the department forward and to improve students' attainment. He is aware of most of the weaknesses which exist but has been unable to tackle them effectively over the last three years because the management of the staffing situation in physics has absorbed his energy and attention. The department maintains a strong emphasis on the three individual strands of science in Key Stage 4 but it is significant that students' relative attainment is better in Key Stage 3 where there is a more co-ordinated approach. Teachers take responsibility within their own subject areas but there is not yet enough sharing of the responsibilities, particularly in relation to monitoring and supporting teaching, for the whole department. The department is not making enough use of the individual skills of teachers in the three areas to inform and improve the practice of others.

112. The department has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has improved but the attainment in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is broadly the same as it was at that time. The department has successfully tackled many of the weaknesses identified in the previous report with significant improvements in schemes of work, assessment and investigative opportunities. There are now fewer lessons in which teaching is unsatisfactory but there are still only a few good lessons. There remains a need to develop a shared vision for the science department.

## **ART**

113. The proportion of students gaining A\* to C grades in the 1999 GCSE examination was below the national average. Boys' results were better than those of girls. The 1999 A\* to C results mark a decline in standards from recent years. Art results were slightly lower than those achieved in other subjects in the school.

114. All students entered for both the GCE A level examination and GNVQ in 1999 were successful. The small number of students involved makes statistical comparisons with national figures inappropriate.

115. At the age of 14, the standard of work seen is above the level expected nationally. Students demonstrate confident use of colour and design in paintings and papier-mâché pots derived from Aboriginal art, and in paintings and prints derived from study of Mayan art. Drawing skills are well-developed in a topic derived from observational work in the local church. Students are able to discuss the research they have undertaken on artists like Ruskin and Delauney, but their evaluative skills are below average.

116. At the age of 16 the standard of work seen is in line with the level expected nationally. Overall standards are better than those suggested in the 1999 examination results, partly due to modifications made in the curriculum and assessment. This is further exemplified by the standards achieved by the students currently in Year 10, who are attaining above the level usually seen at this stage of the course. Painting and design skills are at least satisfactory, with higher attainers possessing particularly good skills. Work completed on a cubism project

reflects imaginative use of materials and ideas. Observational drawings of the human face were often skilfully managed and well-utilised as the basis for developmental work in ceramics and abstract paintings. Year 10 collage work on textures and form clearly built effectively on initial designs using a wide range of media with skill and imaginative flair. Students openly discuss their ideas and explain the techniques they select but a minority have a limited knowledge of the artists they have studied.

117. At the age of 19 the standard of practical work seen at A level and GNVQ is good and in several instances very good. Students select their individual projects with much thought and careful research. Their sketchbooks provide substantial records of the processes they have undertaken. The work of several students indicates higher standards than in previous years. A project on Indonesian art included high quality work in textile design, ceramics and painting. Another project derived from a recent art trip to New York made good use of information technology in the creation of abstract paintings. A further substantial painted piece on mechanical forms was completed to professional standards.

118. Throughout the school, most students are now achieving well in relation to their prior levels of attainment, although the progress made by students with special educational needs, and those who are particularly gifted, is satisfactory rather than good.

119. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The quality of learning is good throughout the school. At Key Stage 3, the very good attitudes of the students have a significant impact on the quality of learning. They are prepared to work very hard on their own initiative. There are a wide variety of approaches amongst teaching staff. In a particularly effective lesson the teacher set high expectations and a brisk pace by providing a series of short timed tasks on drawing, then incorporated skilful questioning, demonstration and visual resources to move the students on to individual abstracted work in a variety of media. This challenged all students from the outset, made them think about their work and inspired them to make imaginative inroads in their main pieces. In an ineffective lesson a teacher wasted a substantial amount of time at the start and end of a lesson, gave a vague indication of what was required of students and left them to their own devices. This set a dull tone to the lesson and students worked at a slow rate with limited enthusiasm. All teachers possess very good standards of class management and provide a supportive environment in which students enjoy working. Teachers do not always encourage students to work to their fullest capacity and the more able students tend to be left to their own devices. Not enough thought is given as to the usefulness of support and extension work provided by some staff as both lower and higher attainers do not make the good progress made by other students. The variety of marks and grades used at Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory and confusing to students.

120. There has been a climate of uncertainty amongst art department staff over the past few years occasioned by the unfortunate long-term illness of the head of department, and this partly accounts for the fluctuations in examination results. The new part-time acting head of department has begun to address many of the issues from the last inspection. The appointee has made sensible changes in the curriculum and assessment strategies at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form which are reflected in the higher standards seen in Years 10 and 12. An achievable and targeted development plan is now in place to address the current deficiencies in assessment and the scheme of work at Key Stage 3. Students' experience of art is significantly enhanced by the imaginative displays of their work provided in most art teaching rooms, and by the opportunities to visit local, national and international exhibitions, work with visiting artists and engage in community art projects.

121. There has been unsatisfactory improvement since the last inspection report. The curriculum content has improved with more world art topics, wider use of primary source



material and a wider variety of media available to students. However, assessment at Key Stage 3 is yet to be addressed satisfactorily and the proportion of students gaining the highest grades at GCSE remains low.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

122. Results in the 1999 GCSE examinations were close to the national average. However, the proportion entered for the examination was much lower than the national average as significant numbers were entered for home economics. Results in home economics were well below the national average and were the worst in the school. All students are now following a full GCSE course in design and technology and there is insufficient data to determine a trend in results over recent years. Results at A level were close to the national average in design and technology last year and have been improving steadily. Results in home economics have been declining, as have the number of students studying the subject and there were too few candidates last year to make valid comparisons with the national average.

123. In the work seen during the inspection, the attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the level expected of students of the same age nationally. This represents a good level of achievement given their attainment on entry to the school. By the age of 14, students know about natural and man-made materials and how to cut, shape and fix them together. They make good progress from working on practical projects requiring a narrow range of tools and skills to designing and making things for themselves. For example, students in Year 9 make wooden storage boxes and casings for electronic sensors. They program models to switch on motors, lights and buzzers and create novel foods for a teashop. A textiles production line is created and a company formed to market a product. Students' practical work is of a higher standard than their understanding of design theory. Many students lack skills in drawing, but most can explain what they intend making. Most students show very accurate measuring and marking skills, which allow them to achieve high standards in terms of the quality of the finished article. Students can use hand and power tools and gain good quality results. The higher-attaining students normally produce good quality drawn and written work. The lower-attaining students struggle with designing and writing about their projects.

124. In the work seen during the inspection, the attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 4 is above the level expected of students of the same age nationally. This represents a good level of achievement given their attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. Most students can assess a situation, decide what can be done, create some ideas and work on the best to show their skills. Students in Year 11 are currently working on silversmithing, designing storage containers, making graphic display systems and food suitable for people of other cultures. In all these areas, many students use imagination and show their understanding of how designers work by producing some well-created portfolios. A few students use information technology well for texts and headings. Students generally set themselves enough practical work to do, but a few students are drifting, rushing to finish projects and are not achieving as well as they should.

125. Individual education plans for the students with special educational needs are insufficiently detailed for effective use in this subject. As a result, students with special educational needs are making satisfactory progress, rather than the good progress made by other students.

126. In the work seen during the inspection, the attainment of students in the sixth form is above the level expected of students of the same age nationally. This represents a good level of achievement given their attainment on entry to the sixth form. Students' theory and portfolio work in general is good. Their designing is often innovative, complex and very demanding. They assess customers' needs, present arguments effectively and can justify their choices. Students use all the equipment available to them in practical work and show accuracy and skill in presentation. Some students, working on play equipment for a local primary school, have assessed the needs of small children very well and their models are attractive, safe and durable. Individual students show great attention to detail when working on their projects.

127. The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and ensures good quality learning. Teachers know their subjects well and are confident when demonstrating, which ensures students gain understanding and that they are taught correct principles. Resources and examples are well chosen to give students ideas and an understanding of good standards. Teachers make good attempts to improve students' literacy and numeracy by their insistence on using correct terminology and attention to marking and measuring. Planning is good. The wide variety of teaching methods is very effective for teaching differing age groups. Teachers create lessons that will interest the students and stimulate their imagination. Lessons usually begin briskly, with a brief recap on previous work and information which focuses students' attention. Students are set objectives that tell them how to proceed and the time allowed. Timing is very good. Students have ample time to do their own work and teachers give all students appropriate individual attention, either to praise them for their efforts or to help and encourage them to do more or better work. Relationships are very good. Most teachers show good humour and sympathy with the students, which helps to build up their confidence and motivation. Control is effective which makes it possible for most students to work without interruptions. At the end of lessons, assessment is a strong feature. Students have to fill in self-evaluation sheets to make them reflect on their progress. Attainment is raised because students are left in no doubt about the quality of their work or the degree of effort made. Expectations are appropriate for most students but they could be higher for the lazy students who choose to make the minimum of effort but are capable of good work. Marking is good and most work shows detailed comments that help students to make corrections or extensions to their work.

128. The department has made a good response to the comments in the last inspection report. The head of department gives good leadership and is striving to raise standards. The refined scheme of work is proving successful in raising attainment and the new, interesting practical tasks for the younger and lower-attaining students have helped to increase their skill levels. Students' basic skills are higher than they were, as accuracy with marking and measuring and using tools are stressed in all lessons. Drawing and presentation remain weaker than practical work. All students now take a technology subject in Key Stage 4. The quality of teaching has improved.

## GEOGRAPHY

129. The proportion of students gaining grades A\* to C in the 1999 GCSE examination was well above the national average with boys achieving higher standards than girls. Students' results in geography exceeded those in most other subjects. The results are an improvement on 1998 and the high standards have been maintained over the last four years. In the 1999 A level examination the students' achievements were above the national average. The results show a rising trend over recent years.

130. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that students' attainment at Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the level expected nationally, whilst at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form attainment is above the level expected nationally. Most students achieve appropriate standards, given their prior attainment, at Key Stage 3, but a minority of students in the early years of Key Stage 3 are not achieving highly enough. Students achieve well at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Independent education plans, provided for students with special educational needs, are often vague and do not set targets or a timetable for improvement. Thus, whilst overall students in Key Stage 4 make good progress, students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

131. At the age of 14, most students are competent in a range of map and graphical skills, though accuracy and presentation are weaker for lower and some middle attainers than is normally seen in Years 7 and 8. Students have satisfactory knowledge of places, particularly of Italy and Japan but atlas skills are insufficiently developed in terms of locating places through latitude and longitude and for research. They have good awareness of the world distribution of inhospitable regions and most understand about the reasons for coastal erosion of the East coast and how best to manage the problems arising. Students speak clearly and confidently, with many making well argued contributions in discussion on planning proposals in a Japanese national park. The writing skills of a minority however, mainly lower attaining students, show weakness in expression and spelling.

132. At the age of 16, students consolidate map skills and possess a good degree of competence in researching a wide range of topics. In GCSE coursework for instance, many students produce good quality assignments on fieldwork based in Old Witney about development planning proposals, whilst others produce well structured and illustrated work about flood control in Bangladesh. In physical geography, students possess good knowledge of terms and understand the processes of river erosion, but a minority of students provide answers that are too general and are not related to places. Most students show mathematical competence in using numerical skills to construct a range of graphs and using data to support and illustrate understanding of topics.

133. At the age of 18, students' written work is of a good standard with notes and well-constructed essays at a level above that usually seen. Students are able to compile notes independently from video, map and text sources and prepare presentations for group discussion. Students have a good knowledge of regional and world issues and demonstrate, for example, their understanding of the influence of global air masses on the Arctic tundra and modern urban developments in Cairo. Some written work, however, is insufficiently developed and students do not always make full use of illustrative material in their writing.

134. Teaching and learning are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Whereas the quality of teaching is consistent at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, it is more variable at Key Stage 3. For example, all students made significant progress in a lesson about coastal erosion in eastern England when they were fully engaged in group work researching information that was followed by a stimulating debate on the findings. In some lessons, however, progress was slow for students with special educational needs

when they received limited support in working on tasks and, for high attainers when tasks provided insufficient challenge. At Key Stage 4, teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the GCSE course requirements, which combined with well selected learning resources in a lesson on water supplies, enabled the students to understand what was expected and they made very good progress on completing the tasks. The marking of assignments corrects and informs on strengths and weaknesses, setting targets for improvement and this makes a significant contribution to the progress that students make on the course. Progress is less evident in some lessons, however, when students spend too long on peripheral colouring tasks or too much time is devoted to an activity. This leads to off-task chattering and the pace of learning consequently slows. In the sixth form effective learning is a consequence of good lesson planning which provides appropriate and relevant challenges. Year 13 students, for example, made good progress in a lesson entailing simulated decision making about the location of a major car manufacturing unit in a developing country, when the outcomes of research were presented to the whole group for evaluation. Teachers are not fully effective, however, in consistently ensuring that students participate in class discussions, with a result that some students are passively engaged and not developing oral skills.

135. Students' curricular opportunities are considerably broadened by opportunities for field-study at each key stage and by a residential course for the sixth form. These complement class-based studies and enhance students' personal and social development. The assessment of students' attainment to National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 is established for Year 9 but not in other years and consequently does not clearly inform about students' attainment and progress through the key stage. The schemes of work are insufficiently developed in identifying the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development or the subject's contribution to students' progress in using information technology. The department identifies its priorities for development and these are appropriate but the planning does not show costs and the longer term view beyond the current year is not specified.

136. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The high examination standards have been further improved at GCSE and A level. The quality of teaching remains good. Although there has been a change in leadership of the subject since the last inspection the quality of management continues to be good.

## **HISTORY**

137. GCSE results in history dropped below the national average in 1997, then recovered over a two year period to return to being above average in 1999. In 1999 students did better in history than in most of the other subjects that they studied. Results at A level have fluctuated over the last four years from being well below the national average in 1996 to rising above it in the following two years before falling below average again last year.

138. At Key Stage 3 attainment is in line with the level expected nationally. Students are achieving the expected standard in their use of historical sources, showing appropriate awareness of possible propaganda in pictures and reports of the evacuation from Dunkirk. Higher attaining students are performing well in their essays on the causes the war, researching relevant information and establishing links between long and short term causes. Lower attaining students have difficulty explaining events but achieve a level of understanding and extend their writing through empathy exercises, such as letters home from soldiers at the battle front. Project work shows the wide range of students' ability to select and organise historical information, ranging from copied material to relevant enquiry that reaches conclusions to the questions set. Students have a good sense of chronology that is developed through activities such as using and making time lines for each of the periods

studied and producing charts to give an overview of a topic, such as the work on the second world war.

139. At Key Stage 4 attainment is above what is expected nationally. The mock examination results and the quality of coursework assignments indicate that Year 11 students are maintaining the high standards achieved last year at GCSE. Recent assignments on President Roosevelt and the New Deal are detailed and well argued but notes and other pieces tend not to be of the same standard, as some students do not organise their files efficiently. In a role play of the Yalta conference, students showed good understanding of the diplomatic positions taken by Britain, Russia and America and the extent to which their aims were met by the peace settlement. Students assimilate new concepts quickly and express their views clearly and intelligently, as in a discussion of the merits and demerits of capitalism and communism.

140. In the sixth form, the current Year 13 students are on course to achieve standards in line with national expectations at A level. Their timed essays show improving examination technique, planning their answers carefully and using their knowledge to best advantage. There is a correlation between the organisation of their files and the quality of their essays, badly organised notes affecting students' consolidation of learning for revision.

141. Students achieve satisfactory standards, given their levels of prior attainment, at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Students achieve well at Key Stage 4. Higher attaining students are not achieving their potential in the Year 7 mixed ability classes, having to work at the same pace as everyone else. In the Year 8 and 9 sets, their progress is better, going into more detail and working at a faster pace. Lower attaining students progress well on tasks that are adapted to their needs, such as a Year 8 exercise, sequencing pictures and captions representing major changes during the industrial revolution. Independent education plans, provided for students with special educational needs, are often vague and do not set proper targets. Thus, whilst overall students in Key Stage 4 make good progress, students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

142. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Teaching is good at Key Stage 4, where the two specialist teachers make effective use of discussion methods to promote learning. All teachers are experienced, senior staff, who manage their students' learning effectively, maintaining good discipline and keeping students on task. In some lessons there is an imbalance between teacher input and student activity, keeping students passive for too long. Students show interest in their studies and co-operate fully in the lesson activities. In general, teachers make good use of the collection of topic booklets that have been put together in the department, but there is evidence of them supplanting rather than supplementing the use of textbooks. In a Year 7 class, the exercise books resemble scrapbooks, as they are full of inserted worksheets. Marking is unsatisfactory. On the examination courses, students' files are not monitored closely. One teacher has fallen well behind with marking and assessment this term. Most students develop the study skills needed for independent learning and show initiative over researching information.

143. Consistent standards are maintained across the school by efficient co-ordination and support for the non-specialists who contribute to the work of the department.

144. Progress has been satisfactory since the previous inspection. Standards have generally been maintained although A level results vary from year to year. The quality of teaching is similar to that observed at the time of the previous inspection.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

145. The school does not enter students for GCSE examinations in this subject. Results in the 1999 A level computer studies examinations were below the national average. Over recent years, the average points score for students entering this examination has been in line with national averages, apart from 1997 when it was below.

146. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 were below those expected for students of the same age nationally. For example, lower attaining students do not understand the principles of spreadsheets or have the time to reinforce their skills when using information technology in mathematics. Sometimes students were unable to apply their knowledge and skills independently as when using a computer to control temperature. Middle and higher attaining students were more successful in this respect when they used publishing software to create a newspaper which told the story of Romeo and Juliet. Out of date software, which is slow to start up and requires only elementary keyboard skills, contributes to lower levels of attainment at Key Stage 3. By the age of 16, standards are well below the level expected nationally. When students reach Key Stage 4, there are insufficient opportunities for them to apply and develop their information technology capability. This results in below average progress for most students and for those with special educational needs. When given the opportunity, students achieve above average levels and make good progress in developing communicating skills. This occurred when students used innovative software to create a storyboard sequence of scenes from Macbeth in an English lesson. Speaking skills were also reinforced during group feedbacks. Overall, students achievements are poor in relation to their levels of prior attainment throughout both Key Stages 3 and 4.

147. Students currently following the A level computer studies course attain standards that are in line with A level course requirements. There is much more independent project work and development of higher level programming skills. This allows students to create Internet websites and use database and spreadsheet software to meet business specifications. Most students show confidence in using these skills and their project work shows satisfactory progress over time.

148. The quality of teaching at both key stages and in the sixth form is satisfactory. The quality of learning in lessons matches the quality of teaching except in the sixth form where students' learning is better than the teaching would usually merit because students develop skills independently of the teacher. The teaching of information technology at Key Stages 3 and 4 is carried out by teachers of other subjects within the course of their normal lessons. Teachers have a secure knowledge of information technology sufficient to meet the needs of their subject and plan lessons well. Objectives are clearly explained for the lesson and large groups are managed well when, for example, overcrowding occurs with computer facilities. Occasionally teachers make good use of new technology as in a Year 9 chemistry lesson when students interrogated the Internet to discover the history of scientists who discovered elements. Teachers adapt well to different roles as, for example, in A level lessons when they act as consultants. Some aspects of lessons are less satisfactory; for example, where there is no whole class activity to sum up key features of a lesson or tasks are not graded to match the attainment levels of students. Occasionally the pace slows and students do not gain enough new knowledge or understanding during the lesson. Homework is not usually set. Most students apply themselves well to tasks and enjoy using computers. They work well in pairs, supporting each other's learning and meeting the lesson objectives. In the sixth form,

students are mature and courteous to visitors. All remain fully engaged during lessons and have good relationships with each other and teachers.

149. The subject is poorly led and managed. The school aims to teach information technology through the other subjects of the curriculum, but this is not working. The school does not meet National Curriculum requirements at Key Stages 3 and 4. At Key Stage 3, there is insufficient time available to cover the National Curriculum or to reinforce basic skills. Although mathematics, English, geography and technology are nominated to provide key components of the information technology curriculum in communication, data handling, modelling and control, the coverage is not sufficient to ensure all students become critical and largely autonomous users of information technology at the age of 14. No record is kept of the contribution made by subjects and the school is unaware of what is being taught. At Key Stage 3, students' attainment is not monitored and National Curriculum levels attained are not included in reports. At Key Stage 4, opportunities to apply and develop skills in a variety of contexts are insufficient. The quality of the department's documentation is very poor and fails to provide a sufficient basis for improvement. There is a specific need to increase and update resources to allow all students to use information technology to measure and record physical variables.

150. Improvement since the last inspection has been poor. Standards at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form have fallen. At Key Stage 4, there was no clear judgement on standards in the previous report against which to judge progress. Assessment and monitoring of progress at both key stages remain major weaknesses. There is still no planned Key Stage 4 curriculum.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

151. In 1999 the proportions of students achieving grades A\* to C at GCSE were close to the national averages in French, German and Spanish, although not all students study a modern language. Students generally do not perform as well in languages than they do in the other subjects they take in the school and this is especially marked for boys. Over the past three years French results have shown a decline; results in German and Spanish declined in 1998 but improved in 1999 to the 1997 level. Results at A level for German and Spanish were close to the national averages. The number of students entered for French is too low to draw meaningful comparisons with national data.

152. Overall, students are achieving satisfactory standards, given their prior levels of attainment, throughout the school.

153. In the work seen during the inspection, students are attaining the standard expected nationally by the age of 14. Students understand well the present, past and future tenses but are less accurate when speaking and writing. They can hold conversations on a range of personal topics such as their family and school life but find unprepared speaking particularly difficult. During the key stage students increase their ability to understand the language but make slightly less progress in speaking and writing. This is because they are not always given opportunities to extend their answers and are not always encouraged to improve their accuracy, especially regarding pronunciation. Except for those students who do not study a language, students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

154. In the work seen during the inspection students are attaining the standard expected nationally for French and German by the age of 16, but standards are below the expected level in Spanish. Students read and understand texts on a wide range of topics but do not frequently write at length in a variety of styles except in coursework tasks, particularly in Spanish. Students read short texts and extract details from tapes. The writing and speaking of a few of the highest attaining students is accurate and includes some complex language and opinions but generally these students make less progress in all areas than would be expected nationally. Lower achieving students make errors similar to those made in Key Stage 3, often have very anglicised pronunciation and a shaky command of the basic grammatical features of the language. They regularly have to revise much of the vocabulary originally taught in Key Stage 3. Students with special educational needs who study the subject make satisfactory progress but there is a significant minority who do not learn a language.

155. By age of 18 students achieve standards which are in line with the standards expected at A level. They understand complex language and ideas on subjects such as environmental pollution and AIDS and write well-informed essays on literature. Their spoken language is of a variable quality, sometimes it lacks accuracy and fluency but on occasions it is idiomatic and students speak confidently at length. Most students produce good work when they have had time to prepare it in advance but lack the ability to speak or write spontaneously.

156. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and brings about satisfactory learning. Teachers speak the language well and present a good model for students to follow but opportunities to improve listening skills are missed as teachers over use English. Insufficient emphasis on oral work during some lessons means that many students have weak pronunciation. An exception to this was seen in a Year 11 lesson where students made spontaneous comments in German and were encouraged to speak at length giving opinions. Most of the lessons were conducted at a brisk pace with a variety of resources and activities. A particularly good example of this was seen with a Year 7 class last lesson in the afternoon, which enabled students to sustain concentration. In the better lessons, students are clear about what they have to do to complete a task but this is not always the case and there were some examples of listening tasks not being clearly explained. Students are not given enough guidance on what they could do to improve their work from comments on work or in reports and few in Key Stage 3 knew at what level they were performing. There is often insufficient challenge for the higher attainers who rarely work from memory. On occasions the teacher dominated the lesson allowing students too little chance to use for themselves what they had learnt. This was especially the case with oral work. Students are given opportunities to use computers but access is limited therefore there is little chance for students to redraft their work to improve accuracy, presentation and style. When lessons take place in the computer room the tasks are well planned and relevant to the topic being studied; students are interested and apply themselves well to their learning. Students are not often encouraged to work independently of the teacher and the shortage of textbooks exacerbates the problem, which is particularly acute in A level French. Students are provided with supplementary sheets in order to help them revise but many of these are not filed carefully even at sixth form level. There is inconsistency in the way that students record grammar and vocabulary and this means that many students have difficulty in revising or using their exercise books for reference. Nevertheless, students are well trained in examination technique during lessons.



157. The examination results are analysed to determine trends but there is insufficient use of this information to target certain groups such as the more able or to identify how much progress individual students are making. Students, especially in Key Stage 3, do not have enough information about how they can improve their performance and little use is made of the available information to adjust the curriculum. A significant proportion of students in Key Stage 4 does not study a language therefore the requirements of the National Curriculum are not being met. The small number of text books available makes it impossible to set appropriate homework on a regular basis.

158. Since the last inspection progress has been unsatisfactory overall as GCSE results, especially in French, have not improved. Nevertheless, all of the teaching is now at least satisfactory and although pockets of underachievement of the more able remain, standards seen in lessons and work have improved.

## **MUSIC**

159. The numbers of students studying music to GCSE and A level are too small to make meaningful comparisons with national statistics.

160. In the work seen during the inspection, attainment at the age of 14 is in line with that expected for students of the same age nationally. This represents a good level of achievement for these students. They perform individual parts and accompaniments with awareness of others, fitting their own part in to the whole performance. Whilst performing, they are aware of the audience and the style of presentation. Students use a range of classroom percussion and orchestral and band instruments. They possess good listening skills and make appropriate use of information technology in performing and composing.

161. In the work seen during the inspection attainment at the age of 16 is below that expected for students of the same age nationally. However, this represents a satisfactory level of achievement for the small group of students who were attaining below the expected level when they started the course. They compose for different instrumentations and use various structures and forms whilst making appropriate use of information technology to create, refine and record their ideas. Although they cover a wide range of listening exercises, many students do not use appropriate musical vocabulary and their spoken answers are very limited.

162. In the work seen during the inspection, the attainment of the two students currently studying music in Year 13 is in line with that expected for students of the same age nationally and represents a satisfactory level of achievement. The strengths in attainment lie in the students' abilities to make cogent comparisons between interpretations of the same piece of music. The main weakness is the limited knowledge of the historical elements of music. The attainment of those students studying for the A level in music technology is above the level expected for students of the same age. They are confident in their use of Cubase and the full range of available music technology, creating and then modifying and refining their work to create pieces that have a realism and musicality. Whilst describing and reviewing their work they confidently use a full range of technical vocabulary.

163. For a number of students, approximately 10 per cent of the school population, levels of attainment and learning is supported by a good range of high quality peripatetic teaching allied to wide range of extra-curricular opportunities offered by the department.

164. Teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The quality of learning is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers' good subject knowledge leads to confident teaching. For example, in a Year 8 lesson this led to tasks being clearly introduced with clear expositions and demonstrations which resulted in students being encouraged to succeed and make good progress. A feature of many lessons observed is a high expectation by teachers which encourages challenge and motivation for the majority of students, although this is less marked at Key Stage 4. Teachers make effective use of question and answer at Key Stage 3 to involve students and to ensure understanding. In group and individual work teachers intervene and demonstrate to encourage students to become more independent. In a Year 7 lesson these techniques were used both to clarify and reinforce teaching points appropriately for individual students, allowing them to make optimum progress in the lesson. In the better lessons, effective use is made of targets that help to motivate and challenge students of all abilities. This was observed in a Year 8 lesson, enabling the specialist musicians to make good progress through extended tasks whilst contributing to the overall class performance. In other lessons there is no planning to ensure that students of all levels of attainment are supported. This results in the progress of both those students with special educational needs and the musically gifted and talented making satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3, whereas the majority of students make good progress. At Key Stage 3 the use of homework to consolidate and extend learning is not always used consistently or effectively.

165. The department has introduced an assessment scheme but its use and application is not consistent across the department and there is unsatisfactory use of assessment information to guide curricular planning. There is a departmental development plan but at present there are no targets to raise attainment.

166. The department has made unsatisfactory progress since the previous inspection. At the time of the last inspection report, attainment was reported as in line or better than national expectations and standards have declined since then. The last report criticised the department for not planning at Key Stage 3 to ensure complete coverage of the National Curriculum. The schemes of work now address this but there is still inadequate planning for continuity and progression through the key stages.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

167. The GCSE examination is not taken in this subject, and the A level examination will be taken for the first time in 2000.

168. In the work seen during the inspection, students' attainment at all levels in the school is in line with the levels expected nationally, with a significant proportion of higher attaining students achieving above average standards in games. This represents a good level of achievement, given students' prior attainment.

169. By the time they have reached the age of 14, most students perform skilfully in a range of games, and show good understanding of the principles of play in the major games. This was well illustrated in a soccer lesson, where students used space well, showed the ability to anticipate movement to the ball and communicated effectively. Good standards are achieved in badminton, where students of all levels of attainment, including some with special educational needs, applied their skills and understanding of tactics, successfully, in a doubles game. Standards in volleyball, in the early stages of the course, are below average. The majority of students have yet to master the basic skills of the game, which limits their effectiveness in play. Planning and performing skills are generally good, but students' evaluation skills are under developed and they rarely observe, analyse and comment on performance against specific criteria. Students' literacy develops satisfactorily in many

lessons, particularly in relation to the use of the technical language of the subject, but there are few opportunities for them to develop numeracy or information technology skills.

170. By the age of 16, most students have a sound understanding of the effects of exercise on the body, and how to warm up before strenuous activity. Almost all students make a significant improvement in games and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding of rules and tactics effectively in full games. Students who attend extra-curricular clubs and practices make very good progress in their chosen activities, well illustrated in an inter-year basketball match. The work of the students studying for A level indicates a sound knowledge and understanding of theoretical aspects, which students can relate, effectively, to their practical studies. Good work was seen in trampolining, where students demonstrated control and technical skill, alongside effective critical observation and analysis of each others' performance.

171. Very high standards are achieved in extra curricular sport, and about a third of the school population participates regularly through an extensive programme of clubs and over three hundred inter-school games fixtures throughout the year. School teams and many individual students gain representative honours at county, regional and, sometimes, national level.

172. The quality of teaching is good, resulting in good learning throughout the school. Lively, dynamic teaching motivates students and stimulates learning at a brisk pace. Management and organisation of lessons is of a high order, and this contributes significantly to the students' good behaviour and high levels of participation in lessons. Students are well motivated, and put good physical and creative effort into their work. Students' attitudes to learning are good in Key Stage 3 and generally very good in the sixth form. However, a few students in Key Stage 4, particularly girls, show an immature attitude to their work and sometimes fail to take what they are learning seriously. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and plan for progression effectively. Well-selected tasks build on students' previous attainment, enabling them to consolidate their existing knowledge and skills through practice, to learn new skills and to develop a deeper understanding of strategic play in games. For example, in soccer, where the teacher conditioned the game, effectively, to ensure students' success in a specific team tactic. The high quality of teachers' observation, assessment and feedback is a strength of most lessons, and promotes improvement throughout the school. This is particularly effective where there is a specific learning outcome and teachers give individual coaching to enable students to work at their own pace. Students with special educational needs are well integrated into physical education lessons, and they achieve at the same rate as their peers, as seen in badminton, where they were keen to participate and took pride in their performance. The potential for high attaining students to progress is well catered for in the extra-curricular programme, but could be more fully exploited in lessons through extension tasks matched to their abilities. The strongest teaching challenges students with a demanding pace of learning, uses probing questioning to make them think and insists on high standards of performance. This was well illustrated in an A level trampolining lesson, which had the additional strength of involving students' evaluation as central to the learning process. Students were engaged in observing and critically appraising each other's work with the result that their depth of learning was extended and discernible progress was made throughout the lesson. A weakness of some lessons is that teachers take too much responsibility for students' learning, and give insufficient opportunities for students to make decisions, solve problems, think for

themselves and gain independence. Opportunities for students to discuss their work in lessons, also contribute well to the development of their literacy skills.

173. Energetic and enthusiastic leadership by the head the department is at the heart of this strong staff team, who work well together with a shared sense of purpose. The outstanding extra-curricular provision is a particular strength of the department, not only in sport, but also in its wider contribution to students' opportunities, such as dance as a part of whole school productions and travel through sporting connections world wide. The energy and rigour, which characterise these initiatives, are not evident in curriculum planning and development, including schemes of work and assessment procedures, at Key Stages 3 and 4, which are areas for improvement. The process of producing health and safety risk assessments in physical activities has begun, but these have not yet been carried out and documented fully.

174. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards of attainment have been maintained. No overall judgement of teaching was made in the last inspection, but the quality of teaching is now good, and has the potential to improve still further through monitoring to identify and share the best practice.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

175. In 1999 the proportion of candidates gaining grades A\* to C was significantly above the national average. Girls and boys performed equally well, but below the level of most other subjects that they studied. This was a result of the subject being allocated only one third of the time enjoyed by other subjects. Results have shown a significant improvement over the last two years. In the GCSE short course the proportion of candidates gaining grades A\* to C was below the national average. The trend in results since the previous year is downward. Boys performed better than girls. 1999 was the first year in which students had been entered for the A level examination and there were too few candidates to make reliable comparisons with national statistics.

176. In the work seen during the inspection, the standard of attainment of students at the age of 14 was good, being above the level expected in the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus and this represents a good level of achievement. Most students can give a confident account of how belief affects the lives of people. They know that it leads to personal and corporate worship, moral attitudes and in some cases to particular modes of dress and life style. They also recognise that within some faiths there are differences. For instance they know that Christian denominations emphasise different aspects of the faith and that the Sabbath has different significance for progressive and orthodox Jews. Many have a good factual knowledge of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, identifying correctly leaders, main teachings, sacred books and buildings where worship takes place. Some can explain confidently important aspects of faiths such as the unity of Islam and Christians' belief in life after death. All have a good knowledge of the specialist vocabulary of the subject.

177. In work seen, the attainment of students at the age of 16 is satisfactory and this represents a satisfactory level of achievement. There is a marked difference between standards produced by students following the full GCSE course and those produced by others. In the best work, on the full GCSE course, students have a very good knowledge and understanding of Christianity and Islam and can compare in depth how the two codes of belief affect their adherents' attitudes to rites of passage. For instance, one Year 11 class could discuss in depth the topic of whether birth ceremonies mean more to the parent than the child. They can explain terms such as "Just War" and understand the two different levels of Jihad in Islam. Students following the short course have a satisfactory subject knowledge but are less secure in their ability to draw out the religious significance from their knowledge.

178. The standard of work seen in the sixth form A level course is well above the level expected and this represents an excellent level of achievement. Students have a good grasp of the work of a range of philosophers and can apply this to the ethical issues which they are studying. They can debate issues from different points of view using appropriate evidence but are weaker in their ability to write clear and cohesive answers to examination questions. Because the school fails to comply with the statutory requirement to provide religious education for all students in the sixth form the majority make no improvement on the standard achieved at the end of Key Stage 4.

179. At Key Stage 3 the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall but most students make good progress. This apparent anomaly is due to a number of reasons. Teachers who do not have religious education as their first subject, with some having little or no past experience in teaching it, teach nearly 90% of lessons in this key stage. However most plan their lessons conscientiously with clear learning outcomes and have good class management skills. They make good use of the excellent resource materials and lesson plans provided by the head of department. Students' good behaviour and attitudes match these positive features. The teachers' lack of secure subject knowledge inhibits in-depth teaching and leads to progress being mainly at a factual level. Where they use some of the suggestions for more ambitious topics, such as a piece of work in which students in Year 7 were asked to write a conversation between father and teenager on the topic "Is God real?", some students respond in thoughtful and extended writing. There is a growing readiness among the teachers to use opportunities for students to reflect and to develop their own system of values and beliefs. Notable outcomes seen were moving personal responses to the Holocaust and a time of reflection in which Year 9 students thought about our need for times of peace. Where the subject is taught by specialist teachers and those with more experience of teaching it, the quality of teaching is very good. The pace of learning is very high and its depth very good. This is due to the teachers' excellent subject knowledge and well focused and probing questioning which constantly challenges students to consider the basis of religious belief and the reasons why believers behave and think as they do. This notably leads to the good progress made by gifted and talented students. Where specially designed material well matched to the needs of students with special educational needs is a feature of the teaching, they make good progress. In other instances they are helped to make at least satisfactory progress through individual support by teachers. There is insufficient planning prior to lessons to ensure that learning support assistants are used effectively.

180. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall with a similar difference between that of specialist and non-specialist teachers. All students following the short GCSE course are taught by non-specialists. Again the head of department provides excellent course material but the teachers' subject knowledge and their confidence to teach the subject at this level limit the depth of learning. In some cases standards and progress are not helped by changes in staffing between Years 10 and 11. Although the majority of students are reasonably well behaved, their attitude is compliant rather than enthusiastic and they make only satisfactory progress. Written work lacks detail and depth of thinking. These factors are reflected in examination results. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress because they are taught in groups of similar ability where the teaching and material are well matched to their attainment and they have a suitable goal of attaining the school's certificate of achievement. The quality of teaching in the full GCSE course is excellent. All the features present in the specialist teaching at Key Stage 3 are evident at this level. Excellent specialist knowledge, high expectations and an extremely positive relationship between teachers and students lead to learning in considerable depth. Excellent questioning and opportunities for students to develop examination technique also aid examination success. Gifted and talented students make excellent progress.

181. The quality of teaching in the sixth form A level course is excellent. The teacher's broad and detailed knowledge of the subject and of related disciplines leads to students developing an excellent knowledge and understanding of the philosophy of religion and ethics. Expectations of them are very high and the pace of learning "breathless". Well focused questioning constantly challenges students to refine their thinking and to sharpen their skills of explanation and justification. Whilst providing a liberal and balanced view of topics, teaching never loses sight of the needs of examination candidates, insisting that they examine issues from different, religious, moral and philosophical viewpoints. Students respond with enthusiasm and commitment and make excellent progress in their knowledge, understanding and debating skills.

182. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department makes an extremely positive response to the poor match of teachers to the demands of the subject. She leads through the example of excellent teaching and is using her role as an Advanced Skills Teacher to support and inspire her colleagues. Detailed teaching materials and specific guidance for non-specialists are now available. She has correctly identified the strengths and weaknesses of the department and the subject's development plan specifically explains how these are to be addressed. A measure of the success of the leadership is the rapid increase in the number of students choosing to follow the full GCSE and A level courses offered.

183. Since the last report there has been good improvement. All Key Stage 4 students now follow an examination course and results in the full GCSE course have improved significantly. Schemes of work and resource material have been written although there is still a shortage of religious artefacts, video material and information technology equipment in the department. The A level course is well established. There is still no provision for religious education for the bulk of students in the sixth form and so the school does not meet statutory requirements in this respect.