

INSPECTION REPORT

CALLINGTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Callington, Cornwall

LEA area: Cornwall

Unique reference number: 112046

Headteacher: Mr S Kenning

Reporting inspector: Mr J Hart
4339

Dates of inspection: 20 – 24 March 2000

Inspection number: 184158

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of the pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of the pupils: Mixed

School address: Launceston Road
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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs S Hurley

Date of previous inspection: 12 December 1994

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
J Hart	Registered inspector	Drama	What sort of school is it? How high are standards (2.1)? How well are pupils or students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
S Hall	Lay inspector	Equal opportunities	How high are standards (2.2)? How well does the school care for its pupils or students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
F Mikdadi	Team inspector	English	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?
I Farquhar	Team inspector	Mathematics	
A Stillman	Team inspector	Science	
J Adams	Team inspector	Design and technology	
M Graham	Team inspector	Information technology	
F Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	History; Religious education	
D Martin	Team inspector	Geography	
C Wakely	Team inspector	Modern Languages	
T Hill	Team inspector	Art	
D Grierson	Team inspector	Music	
S Harriott	Team inspector	Physical education	
K Stevenson	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language	
T Boyden	Team inspector	GNVQ; Sixth form	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 18. The school has a very wide, rural catchment area. There are fractionally more boys than girls in the school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. It is maintained by Cornwall County Council. There are 1,105 pupils on roll, 174 in the Sixth Form. The ethnic mix of the pupils is predominantly white, with a very small number from ethnic minority backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special education needs is average. However, the proportion with statements of special needs is above average. Only two pupils have English as an additional language. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Callington Community College is a good school with many very good features. Standards are high with good examination and test results, which are improving consistently. The quality of teaching is good and often very good. Very good leadership ensures that the pupils enjoy success in all aspects of school life. The pupils bring very positive attributes to their learning. The school's many strengths far outweigh its weaknesses. It provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The pupils achieve high standards at GCSE, GNVQ and A-level.
- Good teaching enables the pupils to learn effectively.
- The pupils bring very positive attitudes to their work.
- Behaviour is very good in lessons and around the school.
- The school provides very good opportunities for extra-curricular experience.
- The headteacher provides very clear direction for the school, which has ensured very good relationships and high morale.
- The accommodation is much improved and is now a pleasant environment for learning.
- Standards in science are very high across the school.
- Provision and activities for art, drama and music are very good.
- The programmes for the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) are very good.

What could be improved

- The quality of assessment, recording and reporting is overall unsatisfactory.
- Provision for information technology (IT) across the curriculum is not having an effective impact.
- The programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is not sufficiently well co-ordinated.
- Careers education and guidance is fragmentary and not integrated into the curriculum.
- Tutor time, at the start of each afternoon, is not consistently planned or effective.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in December 1994. It has made very good improvements since then. The GCSE results have gone up from 43 per cent to 53 per cent of the pupils achieving five or more passes at A* - C. The rising trend in the results has been faster than the national trend. Results at A-level have also improved, from below the national average in 1994 to well above the national average in 1999. The pupils' attendance has also improved from 91 per cent to 94 per cent. The school has made very good improvement in most of the areas identified as issues at the time of the last inspection. Religious education is now taught at Key Stage 4. The arrangements for special educational needs have been successfully reviewed. Teaching and learning at Key Stage 4 have improved considerably. The school development plan has been radically overhauled and is now comprehensive and effective. Facilities in design and technology have also been addressed. The school has not, however, found a satisfactory way of providing a daily act of collective worship and the arrangements for assessment, recording and reporting are still weak.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in the national tests at the end of Year 9, GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
Key Stage 3 test	B	B	A	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
GCSE examinations	A	B	B	A	
A-levels/AS-levels	A	D	A		

Results at A-level were high in 1999, the average points score being well above the national average. Results in art and design, French, English literature, biology and home economics were very good. The trend in A-level results has been upwards, in line with the national trend, although results have fluctuated. In the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) the average points score has been above the national average for the past two years, with particularly good results in health and social care, leisure and tourism and art and design.

At GCSE, results at all levels have risen steadily since the last inspection. The trend upwards has been faster than the national trend. Results in science, art and physical education have been particularly impressive. In 1999, results were also good in drama, design and technology and French. The pupils performed less well in geography, history and information technology. At GCSE, the results are well above average, compared with those achieved in similar schools.

In the national tests for 14 year olds the school achieves high results in mathematics and science. Since 1996, the results in science have been consistently well above the national average. In mathematics, the trend has been for performance above the national average, and the 1999 results were well above. In English, the results in 1999 were close to the national average. Compared with similar schools, the results for 1999 are extremely strong in mathematics and science and average in English.

Standards in literacy, numeracy and information technology are satisfactory.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The pupils bring very positive attitudes to their work and are very enthusiastic about the school generally.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Standards of behaviour are very high. The pupils are trustworthy and show consideration and respect for one another and their teachers.
Personal development and relationships	The pupils' personal development and relationships are very good. They show initiative and take on responsibility well.
Attendance	The pupils' attendance is very high. They enjoy coming to school. Punctuality is also very good.

The pupils' very positive attitudes contribute well to an atmosphere which promotes confidence and a sense of positive achievement.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Very Good

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.

The teaching is good overall. It is strongest in the Sixth Form. Strong subject knowledge, careful planning, high expectations and very good relationships lead to the pupils learning productively and with enjoyment. Very little unsatisfactory teaching was seen. The teaching was good or better in 66 per cent of all lessons seen and very good in 27 per cent. The skills of literacy and numeracy are adequately taught. The teaching is at least satisfactory in all subjects and is particularly good in art, science and physical education. The teaching meets the needs of all the pupils. In the very small number of unsatisfactory lessons seen, the weaknesses included poor management of the pupils, insufficient challenge to actively engage the pupils and inadequate use of assessment information to pitch the lessons appropriately.

The quality of learning is good. The pupils' attitudes and high levels of motivation have a positive impact in lessons. In almost all subjects, the pupils acquire new knowledge and skills with ease and interest. They work productively in lessons and organise themselves well when working in pairs or small groups. The pupils also revise well and prepare themselves carefully for examinations.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provides a good range, breadth and depth of learning at Key Stages 3 and 4. In the Sixth Form, weaknesses are the lack of religious education and the insufficient careers education programme. The range and quality of the extra-curricular provision are very good. Information technology is insufficiently used across the curriculum in the different subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	There is good support for those with special educational needs. The pupils make good progress and are taught well in most subjects. Classroom assistants provide effective support and enable pupils to be fully involved in lessons. The monitoring of the pupils' progress is weak.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are only two pupils with English as an additional language. They are confident in their use of English and are making good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall, the provision for the pupils' personal development is very good. There is sound provision for spiritual development and very good provision for moral and social development. The provision for cultural development is good. The provision for personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory due to poor co-ordination.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The support and guidance provided for the pupils is good. The pastoral system is effective. Tutor time, at the start of each afternoon, is neither consistently planned nor effective. The monitoring of academic progress is weak at Key Stages 3 and 4. Marking of the pupils' work is inconsistent. The information provided to parents about their children's progress is unsatisfactory.

The curriculum at Key Stage 4 has been recently broadened with a wider range of GCSE and GNVQ options. The GNVQ course in the Sixth Form is extremely successful with key skills being effectively taught. At Key Stages 3 and 4, there are insufficient opportunities for the pupils to undertake extended writing or use mathematics in practical tasks and in solving real-life problems. A literacy co-ordinator was appointed last year and Year 7 literacy booster groups have been created and a successful Summer School mounted.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	There is outstanding leadership by the headteacher, very ably supported by the deputy, senior staff and governors. The headteacher has clearly led the staff to successfully meet the school's aims. Leadership is good in many subject areas.

How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors provide good support for the school. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	It is good at all key stages. An annual departmental review process focuses appropriately on the quality of teaching. Where evaluation has uncovered weaknesses, strategies have been successfully put in place to improve performance. The scrutiny of pupils' work is less rigorously addressed.
The strategic use of resources	Financial administration and management are very good. The school's educational priorities relate closely to the allocation of resources. The school makes effective use of its level of resourcing. Accommodation is good overall and has been significantly improved through the efforts of governors and staff.

The headteacher has created a very clear vision for the school and closely involved all members of the school community in implementing this vision. The school's reputation in the community has grown due to the headteacher's efforts. All staff work very hard indeed in an atmosphere of pride and celebration. Non-teaching staff make an important contribution to the school. A weakness is the lack of an induction programme for new staff.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children like the school. • The quality of teaching. • The welcoming approach to parents. • The quality of leadership. • ? ? ? ? ? The extra-curricular provision. • ? ? ? ? ? The children make good progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way in which the school keeps them informed of their children's progress. • The amount of homework set. • The way in which the school works with parents.

The inspectors fully endorse the parents' positive views. The inspectors also support the view that homework could be improved as currently there is no clear homework timetable for the pupils. The inspectors further agree with the parents' comments about information on their children's progress. The school has failed to provide interim progress reports, due to be sent out last term. Annual reports to parents contain little information about how their children can improve their work.

A few parents feel that the school does not work closely with parents. The inspectors do not agree with these views. The school makes great efforts to keep in touch with parents in different ways. The school is also extremely welcoming and informs parents regularly of school events and activities.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is average. National assessment test results immediately prior to entry to the school demonstrate that the pupils entering Year 7 generally match the national expectation for this age group.

2. The school views its Sixth Form as having a comprehensive intake, with courses open for a wide range of interests and abilities. A-level results in 1999 across a range of seventeen subjects were very good and significantly above both local and national averages. For three years the trend has been above the national average. The 1999 results were the best A-level results for any Cornwall LEA school and represent a significant improvement on those at the time the school was last inspected. The average score of 21.2 compares well with the national average of 17.9. Particularly good results were accomplished in art, biology, English literature, French and home economics where A and B grade passes were well above national average. This compares very favourably with the most recent results for the last report when results were over 1.5 points below the local average and nearly 3 points below the national average.

3. GNVQ provision is a strength of the school. This has been recognised in its being designated a Centre of Good Practice by the awarding body, Assessment of Qualifications Alliance (AQA). The significant improvement in A-level performance has been matched in grades at GNVQ A-level. The proportion of pupils achieving distinction and merit grades was 57 per cent of those entered in 1999. This represents a decline on the 68 per cent achieving those grades in 1998 from a lower entry. However, in both years GNVQ candidates attained above the national average points with an average points score of 12.0 compared to the national average of 10.9 in 1998; and 10.9 compared with the national 10.2 in 1999. The overall pass rate in 1998 was 88 per cent; and in 1999, nearly 84 per cent. These results represent a significant improvement over those at the time of the last report. This represents a good level of progress for pupils on the various courses, some of whom attained high grades in the Year 11 examinations. Over the past two years there have been particularly good results in art and design, health and social care and leisure and tourism.

4. Attainment in the current Sixth Form is good across nearly all A-level subjects and GNVQ options. It matches that in the other key stages of the curriculum. Pupils of all capabilities, with different attainment levels, are making good progress. Good examples of general attainment and progress made by the pupils were observed in general studies lessons. In one, Year 13 pupils reflected on a range of the moral dilemmas associated with capital punishment following a powerful film extract and were able to discern very clearly the difference between emotive and rational responses to a question. In another lesson various groups of Year 12 pupils worked on personal projects under the umbrella of a Liverpool University accredited programme. Much of their self-directed work showed mature planning and decision making coupled with considerable enthusiasm as they developed projects such as a school talent competition, a video documentary on the aspirations of primary school children and the publication of a school 'exchange and mart' magazine. There is also much favourable feedback from employers on pupil performance on their work placements.

5. At GCSE, the school's results have risen steadily since the last inspection. The upward trend has been faster than the national trend. In 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades at A* - C was above the national average. Also, the average point score at GCSE was above the national average. The girls performed particularly well but the boys' results were above the national average too. Over the past three years, boys and girls have both performed well above the national average. In 1999, the pupils' results in science, art, design and technology and drama were particularly good when compared to their results in other subjects. Their results in French were also good. The pupils performed less well in geography, history and information technology. Overall, compared with similar schools, i.e. those with a commensurate proportion of free school meals (FSM), the A* - C grades are above the expectation for schools in its FSM band and well above the expectation for average points score at GCSE.

6. In English, at GCSE, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher grades in English language in 1999 was close to the national average. In English literature, the proportion was below the national average. Boys' attainment is weaker than the national comparisons and this is adversely affecting results. Also, poor attainment is not being effectively used to set individual targets for the pupils. In mathematics, the proportion attaining the higher GCSE grades was slightly below the national average in 1999 but the current Year 11 are in line to achieve higher results. In science, results are well above the national average for boys and girls.

7. In the 1999 national tests for 14 year olds, the school achieved high results in mathematics and science. The trend over time in science is impressive, with the school performing consistently well above the national average since 1996. In mathematics, the trend has been for performance above the national average, and the 1999 results were well above. In English, results have fluctuated over time with the 1999 performance being close to the national average. Compared with similar schools, the results for 1999 are extremely strong in mathematics and science and average in English.

8. In the other subjects, attainment is at least average at Key Stage 3. It is above average in physical education, religious education and drama. Attainment is well above average in art and average in design and technology, information technology, history, geography, music and modern foreign languages.

9. High standards of work were seen in many lessons in the course of the inspection. In Years 10 and 11, there is careful preparation for the GCSE examinations and the extension revision programme is a major factor in the good results achieved. In a Year 11 English lesson, the teacher made intelligent use of an unplanned opportunity to discuss in depth the issues of relationships after a reading of William King's "The Beggar Woman". This helped ensure that the pupils had a good understanding of the subtext for the examination. A Year 10 physics lesson employed role-play, whereby the pupils acted out the passage of electrons through a wire at different temperatures. This innovative teaching approach resulted in far higher standards of comprehension and knowledge of this aspect of science. In a Year 10 geography lesson, higher attaining pupils demonstrated their competence in analysing the complex geographical problems associated with an ageing population.

10. Work of a high standard was also evident in a number of lessons in other years. For example, Year 12 pupils made good progress in a French lesson where they took part enthusiastically in a drama activity, having scripted, acted and filmed their own soap opera. In a Year 8 outdoor education lesson, a large class was organised and inspired to take up a variety of physical challenges. As the pupils had to plan, perform and evaluate their

solutions of the problem-solving activities, they were able to articulate clearly and demonstrate the quality of their understanding and knowledge. An A-level economics class readily related theoretical economic concepts to contemporary issues – linking the latest budget statement to the dangers of “overheating” the economy. In a Year 9 music lesson, the pupils effectively interpreted the mood of the “blues” in their own words and melodies. They listened attentively to the development of good ensemble skills and then devised their own renderings on this theme.

11. Standards in literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. Pupils can read and write with confidence and understanding. Spelling is largely accurate, although the efforts put into enhancing the pupils’ spelling performance by the English teachers are often not reflected in other subject areas. The pupils are developing appropriate technical vocabularies for the different curricular areas and speak clearly and with confidence in most settings. Opportunities to engage in continuous writing in English and other subjects are limited. Numeracy skills are sound and improve as pupils move through the school. By the age of 16, the vast majority of pupils have improved their levels of basic skills to use numeracy effectively in science, design and technology and art. Information technology is insufficiently used across the curriculum to help raise standards in other subject areas.

12. The school undertakes considerable analysis of data and outcomes have been used by the headteacher and governors to set statutory targets for improvement in academic performance. The targets agreed with the LEA are challenging but manageable with the good attention being paid to strategies for improvement by the school. A strength of the school is the way in which the pupils are prepared for assessment tests and examinations – this strength will evidently assist the school in reaching the targets set. However, a weakness in assessment means that some of the pupil data is not being effectively used by teachers, pupils and parents to plan for future improvement.

13. The pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall at Key Stages 3 and 4, and their attainment is often better than expected, considering some of the difficulties they face. Progress is good in English, science, history, religious education, art, design and technology, drama and physical education in both key stages. At Key Stage 3 the pupils with special educational needs also make good progress in mathematics. Progress is sound in all other areas of the curriculum.

14. The pupils with statements of special educational needs make good progress towards their individual reading targets, frequently achieving gains of almost a year in their reading ages between annual reviews. However progress with spelling is almost always unsatisfactory, and gains in spelling age are insufficient.

15. The school has identified a group of gifted and talented pupils in Year 7, who are beginning to follow an innovative programme of enrichment activities. The programme is an excellent addition to the curriculum opportunities offered. It is, however, too early to judge the progress of this group within the programme. The progress of more able pupils is good overall, and they generally achieve high grades in Key Stage 3 tests and in GCSE examinations.

16. The pupils are achieving well across all key stages. This is evident from the analysis of data over recent years and the range of evidence considered during the inspection. Also, the value added indicators confirm this good progress: the 1999 GCSE cohort achieved far better results than expected, based on their 1997 Key Stage 3 test results. Standards have clearly risen since the last inspection: there is a 10 per cent improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining 5 A* - C grades at GCSE; results at A-

level have improved from below the national average in 1994 to above the national average in 1999.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. The pupils' attitudes to school are generally very good and have a beneficial impact on their learning. This shows some improvement since the last inspection. They are proud of the school and usually enjoy lessons and extra-curricular activities. During a discussion with inspectors, for example, one pupil stated that he got a 'buzz' of excitement thinking about coming back to school after the summer holidays. The pupils are generally enthusiastic about their work, and most put a great deal of effort into coursework and preparation for examinations. The Sixth Form pupils have a particularly mature approach to their work. On the few occasions in lessons when the pupils' attitudes were unsatisfactory, this was due to the slow pace of the lesson and the teachers' poor classroom management.

18. The behaviour of the pupils in lessons and around the school is very good. The school generally operates as a happy and harmonious community. In lessons, the pupils understand that the teachers have high expectations of good behaviour and respond well to the system of sanctions and rewards. During an unscheduled fire drill, for example, the behaviour of the pupils was exemplary. The pupils behave extremely well at lunchtime and are allowed in the classrooms without close supervision. They are trustworthy and generally show respect for property, the exception being some vandalism of the toilets. Pupils state that incidents of bullying are rare. There were two permanent exclusions during the past year, which is lower than the average for similar schools.

19. The pupils' personal development and relationships are very good. Relationships are particularly strong throughout the school community, and the pupils describe the school as a very friendly place. The pupils work well together in groups, and help each other, for example when working on computers. Older pupils support younger ones through the 'On Route' counselling service and the college support team. These initiatives provide very good opportunities for the pupils to take on responsibility. The pupils are helpful and friendly, and enjoy talking to visitors about their work. They show initiative through the work of year committees and the college council, which bring about changes in school life. When the pupils are given suitable opportunities they show respect for one another's feelings. This was seen in a Year 11 personal and social education lesson, when pupils listened with sensitivity to one another's feelings of worry and anxiety.

20. The attendance of the pupils is very good and has improved since the last inspection when it was judged to be satisfactory. The attendance rate of 94 per cent for 1998/9 was well above the national average, and the unauthorised absence rate of 0.3 per cent was below the national average. The attendance of Years 10 and 11 pupils has improved greatly, and the attendance of all year groups (from 7 to 11) is over 90 per cent. Very few pupils are late for school, and truancy from lessons is rare. The pupils' very good attendance and punctuality have a positive impact on attainment and progress.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The overall quality of the teaching is good. It is a strength of the school and a key factor in the improvement in attainment. Of the lessons observed during the inspection, 96 per cent were judged to be at least sound, 66 per cent to be good and 27 per cent very good. Although good across the school, the teaching is strongest in the Sixth Form. The teaching has improved substantially since the last inspection: the proportion of satisfactory

teaching is much higher now; the proportion of good and very good teaching is also far higher. Improvements have been made in the pace of lessons, teachers' expectations and discipline. The school prepares the pupils extremely well for national assessment tests and examinations - this strength in the teaching is reflected in the improving results.

22. A major factor in the continuing rise in standards of attainment in the Sixth Form is the quality of teaching across the subject and vocational departments. The overall standard observed was good and, in almost one third of those areas, very good. Virtually no teaching seen was unsatisfactory. The teachers are well informed about their subjects and can transmit their knowledge and understanding very effectively to the pupils. There are high expectations and pupils invariably work well in partnership with their teachers and value the contribution their teachers make to help them progress. Lessons observed showed a very positive response by the pupils. Much of their work is well presented with good use of information technology to enhance the quality of presentation. In GNVQ in particular there are very good examples of teachers helping the pupils to develop a range of different projects within the same lesson. Key skills of communication, information technology and application of number are also well taught within GNVQ.

23. The teaching in English is good and very good in the Sixth Form. At Key Stages 3 and 4, the teaching is structured with a clear focus on enhancing examination performance. In the Sixth Form, the teachers challenge the pupils effectively in well prepared and well structured lessons. Higher attaining pupils are appropriately challenged and pupils with difficulties in their learning are well supported. Teaching strategies have been put in place to improve results. In mathematics, teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Teaching is characterised by sound relationships with the pupils and patient explanations of tasks and problems. However, there is too wide a gulf between the best teaching and the least effective teaching. Many pupils benefit from well controlled lessons, where the teachers ask searching questions and extend the pupils' thinking. In a minority of classrooms, however, control is not strong and the lessons are pedestrian with insufficient challenge for the pupils. In science, the teaching is good overall and very good at Key Stage 4. The teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is consistently good and deployed across the school to good effect. The teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and willing to expand upon ideas and use interesting anecdotes and a range of skills to maintain the pupils' interest and concentration. Expectations are high and good use is made of all available time.

24. Teaching is good or very good throughout the school in art, music, physical education, modern foreign languages, drama and GNVQ. It is good at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form in design and technology and information technology. Teaching is good in history and religious education at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form. In geography, it is very good in the Sixth Form and good at Key Stage 3. Elsewhere, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory. A weakness across the school is the lack of information technology in subject areas. Literacy and numeracy are adequately taught across the curriculum. The school has appointed a literacy co-ordinator who is having a positive impact on literacy skills across the school. There is insufficient extended writing taking place across the school and also inadequate opportunities for the pupils to use mathematics in practical tasks and in solving real life problems.

25. The key features of the best teaching (seen in approximately two lessons in three at Key Stages 3 and 4; four lessons in five in the Sixth Form) include:

- strong subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject;
- careful planning of the lessons;

- high expectations of the pupils' abilities;
- very good relationships between staff and pupils;
- challenging and, at times, inspirational level of activities.

26. Many lessons were observed during the inspection that included these features. Subject expertise was evident in a Year 13 drama lesson, where the teacher acted in role to demonstrate key skills and also directed the pupils as in professional theatre. The 'warm-up' voice exercises and mime activities further reflected the teacher's solid theatre and drama expertise. A Year 11 physical education lesson on practical badminton skills focused successfully on a tournament situation through players of equal standard playing in opposition and the teacher's knowledge of the game improving tactics and levels of performance. A Year 7 religious education lesson delved into abstract concepts such as 'What is the nature of the universe?' but the teacher's strong knowledge of sacred writing and use of meditation enabled spiritual development and good discussion.

27. The teachers plan their lessons well and clearly know what they wish the pupils to learn and understand. A Year 11 science lesson on evolution demonstrated very clear planning and precise outcomes for the pupils. For these lessons, the pupils have their own version of the science course and they mark off sections upon completion. After handling a range of fossils, the pupils were asked to produce a sequence of notes and diagrams explaining the formation of fossils. There was extension work after this initial task and the pupils were clearly aware of the purpose of the lesson and how it linked into their GCSE course. A Year 10 French lesson also encapsulated well several of the very good features evident in many classrooms: the lesson introduced a new topic of booking into a hotel and the teacher effectively built on previous transactional language learned; the pupils were encouraged to work from memory and the teacher provided specific support to two weaker pupils; and good use of the target language enabled a challenging pace to be set for the learning.

28. A very small number of unsatisfactory lessons were seen (four per cent). The key features of unsatisfactory teaching include:

- weak management of the pupils;
- insufficient challenge in actively engaging the pupils;
- inadequate use of assessment information to pitch the lesson appropriately.

29. The few lessons that had some of these factors resulted in poor progress for the pupils. In the latter half of a German lesson, for example, the task was poorly matched to the pupils' needs, resulting in the pupils becoming inattentive and making little progress in their learning. A weakness across most departments is assessment. The marking of the pupils' work is inconsistent and different departments are using different assessment approaches. Assessment is being insufficiently used in teaching to help and encourage pupils to overcome difficulties.

30. Homework is satisfactory overall but there are weaknesses in the arrangements and quality of homework. There is no clear timetable for homework, although the school has fairly recently reviewed the policy and procedures. Many pupils and parents feel that there are shortcomings: teachers do not consistently set homework at the expected times; pupils find it hard to plan and manage the number of subjects and quantity set; the marking of homework is inconsistent. The new homework planners are very comprehensive and are a useful aid in corresponding with parents and managing the completion of homework.

31. The pupils with special educational needs are taught well in most curriculum areas. The teaching is satisfactory in all other subjects. In the best lessons, work is well matched to the pupils' needs and questioning is used effectively to draw out key themes. In a good English lesson, the teacher used a range of questions to prompt the pupils to think carefully about the key events and characters in the story while ensuring that they could all provide at least some of the answers. This meant that the pupils were quickly involved in the task and well motivated. The teacher was also able to provide lots of positive feedback, including praise, and consequently the pupils showed high levels of concentration for the whole lesson.

32. In the few lessons when the teaching was unsatisfactory the pace of the lesson was too slow and the pupils were given tasks which had little real educational purpose. For example, in one lesson pupils coloured in a poster while the teacher worked with individual pupils on their personal folders. For the majority of the class this was a meaningless task, and they learned nothing new in the lesson.

33. Classroom assistants usually provide effective support in lessons, enabling the pupils with special educational needs to take a full role in the lesson and to make good progress. For example, in a design and technology lesson the classroom assistant helped the pupil to frame his own ideas and to communicate these to others in an appropriate way, and this led to the pupil developing a greater understanding of industrial textile techniques. In an English lesson a pupil with visual impairment was well supported by a classroom assistant who helped him to use a large print dictionary to complete a spelling activity. The pupil was then able to be involved with the whole class in writing correct answers to the question on the whiteboard.

34. The quality of learning is good. A strength of the school is the pupils' attitudes and their high levels of motivation which have a positive impact in lessons. In almost all subjects, the pupils acquire new knowledge and skills with ease and interest. Discussions with the pupils during the inspection confirmed their thirst to learn and their ability to organise themselves for learning. They work productively in all lessons and demonstrate extremely high levels of interest and concentration. The pupils' own knowledge of their learning is very good in the Sixth Form and sound at Key Stages 3 and 4. The pupils are good in the Sixth Form at making intellectual, physical and creative efforts. At Key Stages 3 and 4, the pupils make satisfactory efforts in these areas. The pupils are capable of making good or very good efforts but are insufficiently delegated responsibility in some lessons to demonstrate this. The pupils with special education needs work at a good pace and are learning well.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

35. In the Sixth Form the school has long encouraged pupils to combine A-level and vocational courses on their individual programmes. Nearly 20 per cent of all A-level pupils are involved in combined programmes of some kind. The school has given a great deal of thought to planning for the changes to the national post-16 curriculum from September 2000, in particular key skills where a significant development programme for integrating those skills across all subject areas, both A-level and GNVQ, is being led by a recently appointed co-ordinator. The school provides a good range of courses with the intention of matching the needs of all its pupils. This occasionally means that in the GNVQ course, pupils studying at two different levels, advanced and intermediate, are taught together. This sometimes dilutes the impact of the teaching.

36. In addition to their chosen subject areas, the pupils' Sixth Form curriculum contains a range of additional provision. A general studies programme operates in both Years 12 and 13. The programme is modular in both years. The Year 12 programme is drawn from a range of options brought together by the teachers. Although it contains some good features, such as the Liverpool project and a pre-driving course, it is not a coherent programme and provides too few opportunities to consider contemporary social, moral and cultural issues. A significant weakness of post-16 curriculum provision is absence of religious education in any recognisable formal sense. The absence of recreational physical education from taught curriculum time is a further weakness. There are good opportunities for community involvement in the Sixth Form and a good range of extra-curricular opportunities.

37. At both Key Stages 3 and 4 the quality and range of the learning opportunities offered to the pupils are good. The curriculum meets statutory requirements at Key Stages 3 and 4 as well as the examination syllabus requirements at Key Stage 4. Since the appointment of the new headteacher, the Key Stage 4 curriculum has been considerably improved with choices allowing pupils some independence in choosing subjects from a broad and balanced option choice. There are two weaknesses at Key Stages 3 and 4 in the coverage of the attainment targets of the National Curriculum in English and mathematics. The pupils have insufficient opportunities in English to do extended writing. In mathematics, the pupils have insufficient opportunities to use mathematics in practical tasks and in solving real-life problems.

38. The school has been successful in providing learning opportunities that enhance the learning of all pupils, including the talented and gifted pupils, as well as the pupils with special educational needs. The formal curriculum is supported by a very good programme of extra-curricular activities that includes literacy acceleration classes, clubs, out of school activities, sporting activities and a good use of the library, which the school shares with the public. Revision and support classes are held for many subjects after school. A breakfast club is in operation and the school arranges for some buses to leave later on two afternoons, to ensure that all pupils can benefit from extra-curricular activities. School dramatic and musical productions are mounted regularly and provide very good opportunities for the pupils' involvement and participation. A series of master classes to challenge highly motivated pupils is mounted on Saturdays at regular intervals. There is also a good range of day and residential visits, as well as visitors coming into the school. The school is very active in participating in sporting fixtures locally and at county level.

39. The school appointed a literacy co-ordinator last year. As a result of his thorough research into the pupils' prior attainment, literacy acceleration groups have been created in Year 7 and the work covered there is beginning to show results. This year the Key Stage 3 intervention programme included a highly successful Summer School. Since September 1999 there have been many literacy initiatives. Whole school in-service training on literacy, the setting up of the literacy management groups and action research with the science department are the few beginnings in what promises to be a comprehensive literacy improvement programme over the coming year. Currently, the provision for enhancing literacy skills is sound.

40. Overall, the provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is unsatisfactory. There is no policy for PSHE, but a sound scheme of work is in place. The co-ordination of PSHE is poor, with the pupils unclear of the purpose and confused by the organisation of the programme. A block of Year 10 lessons in PSHE has been given over to lessons in information technology, reducing the amount of time available to teach important personal and social skills. The teaching of PSHE during the week of the

inspection was at least satisfactory, with some excellent teaching of stress management skills for Year 11 pupils. The lessons seen concentrated mainly on imparting facts, with little emphasis on the skills of decision-making and problem-solving. PSHE is taught by 17 different members of staff, some teaching only one period a week. Some have very little specialist knowledge, for example of drugs, and most rely on resources such as videos and printed material. The PSHE programme has not been monitored or evaluated. A detailed drugs education policy is in place, but the sex education policy has not been reviewed since 1995.

41. Careers education currently forms part of the personal, social and health education programme at Key Stages 3 and 4. Careers guidance and advice is provided to pupils on an individual basis by the school careers co-ordinator. The pupils have access to resources in the careers library and guidance interviews provided by the local careers service. There are clear learning outcomes for careers education in the school's documentation. Specific links are drawn to work experience provision. However there is a lack of clarity as to how the programme should be taught within the PSHE framework and there are no criteria for evaluating how effective that teaching is. The co-ordinator can give guidance on what makes for good standards of provision but staff have considerable autonomy to determine their own strategies for careers lessons. Hence the impact of the co-ordinator's guidance can often be marginal.

42. In the Sixth Form there is very effective guidance and advice on all aspects of applying for higher education but there is little careers education otherwise beyond the informal support given by some tutors and elements within the GNVQ programme. The range of guidance provision from the local careers service has been significantly reduced recently. There are plans for changing the structure of careers education, information and guidance provision in the school. Despite being awarded 'Investor in careers' status some years ago, the school has made generally unsatisfactory progress with provision of careers education since the last OFSTED report. Urgent action is now required to ensure that all the pupils receive their due entitlement to good quality provision.

43. The school's partnership with the community is very good. These links have a positive impact on the pupils' attainment and personal development. Local residents and professionals working in the community hold the school in high regard. The pupils mix with members of the public who use the library, sports facilities and attend adult education classes on school premises. Accommodation is let to a local pre-school group, which also offers high quality work placements to the pupils studying GNVQ health and social care. The school has provided accommodation to enable health professionals to provide a valuable and accessible teenage information and advice centre (TICTAC), in the school grounds. The service is widely advertised in school and a good number of pupils use the centre. The school has established very good links with local employers, which enable pupils to prepare for the world of work. The pupils benefit from work experience, work placements, mock interviews and industry days. The school has good links with the local church. A number of local clergy are invited to take part in assemblies and the church is used for special services. A good range of trips and residential visits enrich the curriculum, and European links are particularly strong.

44. The school's links with its partner institutions are generally satisfactory. Transfer arrangements for the Year 6 pupils are very good, and parents value the school's induction programme. There are some curriculum links with the feeder primary schools, but no regular meetings for subject co-ordinators. The school works well with local schools to devise special programmes for disaffected pupils.

45. The school makes very good provision for the spiritual, moral social and cultural development of its pupils. The school has a clear set of aims that are set out in the prospectus, centred on the four principles of lifelong learning, respect, achievement and community. The values of the school are laid out unequivocally in the prospectus. There has been no recent review of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision of the school, however, good examples can be found of provision for all these areas of pupil development.

46. The school does not meet the legal requirements for a daily act of worship. Assemblies are used to re-enforce positive behaviour and to applaud success, but no opportunities were observed for pupil reflection. Tutor time which replaces assembly for pupils on four days of the week, is not viewed as an opportunity for spiritual development. This was the situation at the time of the last report.

47. The provision for spiritual development is sound. Good opportunities for spiritual development are provided in drama where pupils are encouraged to consider the effects of atmospheric movement and lighting, and in history, where pupils consider the beliefs of the North American Indians and the effects of their beliefs on their lifestyle. In English, the pupils are provided with good opportunities for spiritual development in the study of poetry and prose that reflects the feelings of those caught up in the difficult issues of slavery, apartheid and racism. In religious education, the pupils are given the opportunity to reflect upon ultimate questions of life and death. They consider the beliefs and philosophies behind religion and reflect on the effects of belief on the individual. The department provides very worthwhile opportunities for spiritual development in the periods of meditation and reflection that are available for the pupils.

48. The provision for moral development is very good and the school provides a clear moral lead for its pupils. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to consider ethical issues in English, history, geography and religious education. In biology, pupils in Year 13 participated in a valuable discussion on the issue of genetic screening, and the use of genetically modified crops in third world countries. The work of Martin Luther King is studied in history and Gandhi is studied in religious education as examples of people who have defended human rights. In English, moral issues are considered as they appear in literature, such as the abuse of women and the need for personal responsibility. In history, the pupils consider the effects of war and the tragedy of the holocaust. Personal, social and health education lessons provide a clear platform for discussion of the abuse of drugs and the dangers inherent in their use.

49. The provision for social development is very good. The social development of pupils is encouraged by their involvement in many areas of school life outside curriculum time. The school council actively involves the pupils in the management of their school and the pupils are key to the formation of the school newspaper and year book. The college support team is trained to provide a supportive role and is well used to support school activities such as the Social Inclusion Conference, as well as to offer help to pupils who may have concerns. The 'On Route' group of Sixth Form pupils are available to advise and support younger pupils. The involvement of the pupils in peer support is very good social development. The social development of all pupils is encouraged by the range of clubs and activities offered and in the frequent use of paired and group work in lessons. The experience of working in the reception area and of pupil participation in the work experience programme further enables the pupils to communicate with those outside the normal confines of school.

50. The provision for cultural development is good. The school's exchange programme enables pupils to experience life in another culture, while many areas of study provide pupils with opportunities to use multicultural examples in their work. Art considers the work of aboriginal, African and American Indian artists, while in design technology, the pupils use examples from other cultures when considering food and textile design. In a French lesson pupils gained valuable multicultural experience in their appreciation of Breton music and culture. The school provides an attractive centre for cultural activity; art is celebrated in the various displays and music and drama groups provide opportunities for the pupils to become actively involved in cultural activities.

51. Good examples of departments actively promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils can be found in most areas of the school. However, there has been no audit of where this good practice takes place which would enable the school to identify missed opportunities and so develop the pupils further.

52. The school makes good curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs. Those in Year 7 are fully and effectively included in the school curriculum. Some of the pupils in Years 8 and 9 are withdrawn from German lessons for additional literacy support in a small group. This provision is usually effective, and is organised well to ensure that the pupils' entitlement to the national curriculum is met. All the curricular needs of pupils with statements of special educational needs are met.

53. Four pupils are disapplied from the National Curriculum. Replacement programmes are well planned and effective in meeting the needs of these pupils. However, the current process to modify the curriculum is not sufficiently thorough, and does not ensure the full involvement of parents and others in the process.

54. A good range of additional curriculum opportunities is offered to the identified group of gifted and talented Year 7 the pupils. After-school enrichment classes and occasional Saturday master classes provide challenging and stimulating contexts in which the pupils develop their thinking and their understanding of complex processes. For example in one master class, the pupils explored theory of different intelligences and identified their own preferred learning style. Pupils later spoke enthusiastically about what they had learned on this day, and how they could use the knowledge to improve their learning in a range of subject areas.

55. Since the last inspection, a number of improvements have been made to the curricular and other opportunities offered to the pupils. The range of courses available has broadened at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. For example, the school has recently introduced Part I GNVQ in information technology at Key Stage 4; there are now 17 A-level courses on offer. The range of GCSE courses has also increased and the pupils now can select more subjects from the options available. Extra-curricular provision has also developed well since 1994, good examples being the breakfast club, revision sessions and master classes. Links with partner institutions have improved with fewer pupils of the expected intake opting for other secondary schools.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

56. In the Sixth Form formal assessment and reporting procedures ensure that the pupils receive two annual reports monitoring their progress and three in GNVQ. However the quality of assessment is variable across the A-level subject areas. At best it helps pupils to reflect on their strengths and set realistic targets for their future development. It also gives clear guidance on the approaches they might take to improve their work. When

it is less successful, it concentrates on a straightforward assessment of current subject knowledge and understanding with little guidance on how the individual might progress. Assessment procedures and the quality of assessment feedback to pupils are great strengths of GNVQ provision and the quality of the process has been recognised by the external awarding body.

57. Most pupils speak highly of the range of academic and personal support they receive from their individual subject teachers and form tutors. However, there is no strong emphasis on pastoral guidance by the Sixth Form tutors and too little time is available for it to take place within the tutor period each day.

58. The educational and personal support and guidance that the school provides for its pupils is good. The school is generally effective in providing a supportive and caring community for the pupils. The school's pastoral system provides an appropriate mechanism for pupils' personal welfare. Tutors and heads of year work effectively with pupils who have academic or personal problems; the support for disaffected pupils is especially good. The last inspection report stated that tutor time was not well used, and there has been little improvement. Tutors often use the time to give out information or check planners, but very few tutors follow the weekly planned programme.

59. The school generally has good procedures to ensure the pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school's arrangements of child protection are very good. The head of upper school is the designated member of staff with responsibility for child protection, and all new staff receive awareness training. The school sensitively raises the pupils' awareness of child protection issues using NSPCC resources. The school has a clear child protection policy and has established good links with support agencies.

60. The arrangements for first aid are generally good. Three members of staff are qualified in first aid, and a good number have basic training. Any pupils who are injured or become ill receive good care and attention, but the accommodation for first aid is unsatisfactory. The pupils are treated in the reception area, as no staff are available to supervise pupils in the medical room. Good procedures are in place for recording accidents and storing medication, but there is no first aid policy or written procedures.

61. The school generally pays due attention to health and safety. There are good systems in place for recording potential hazards, and regular checks of the premises are undertaken. Testing of equipment is up-to-date, and an unscheduled fire drill during the inspection was carried out to a very high standard. The health and safety policy is not specific to the school and there are no written procedures for health and safety matters. Risk assessment is not yet complete. A number of health and safety concerns were brought to the attention of the bursar during the inspection. The school should consider the following:

- science – review the storage of flammable chemicals, and those chemicals awaiting disposal;
- design and technology – ensure that staff and technicians have all the safety certification required for workshop machinery and equipment;
- GNVQ manufacturing – ensure that all machinery is correctly installed, including emergency stop systems, hard wiring of equipment through isolators and NVOL starters, foot/knee stops and essential machinery guards.

62. The school's procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good. Registration procedures meet statutory requirements and the system of central registration each morning is efficient. Very good arrangements are in place to monitor absence, both from school and from lessons. Parents value the way in which the school immediately contacts parents to follow up unexplained absences. The school works closely with the educational welfare officer to follow up any concerns about pupils' attendance.

63. The procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are very good, and the school operates as an orderly community. The school has drawn up a clear and detailed behaviour policy, which emphasises rewarding good behaviour and effort. Pupils, staff and parents understand the clear system of rewards and sanctions, which is consistently applied by teachers. The school has good systems in place to monitor and inform parents of both good and unacceptable behaviour. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are good. A clear anti-bullying policy is in place and the pupils report that rare incidents are generally dealt with swiftly.

64. Overall, the monitoring of the pupils' academic progress and the effectiveness of assessment are unsatisfactory. Across the school, the monitoring of academic progress is a weakness. Tutors, who know their the pupils well, monitor academic progress. However, there is no formal connection between the tutor and the subject teachers, which means that once progress has been monitored, the tutor is in no position to set appropriate subject targets for the pupil. Subject teachers receive 'ad hoc' information on the monitoring outcome. This situation leaves pupils not knowing what to do next to overcome the weaknesses identified. Full reports give general comments on achievement and progress without any advice on what the pupil needs to do to improve a performance.

65. In mathematics, science and history, assessment information is used effectively to guide curricular planning. Elsewhere this area is a weakness of the school. In most departments the schemes of work lack sufficient flexibility to allow for the assessment of the pupils' progress to have an impact on teachers' planning. The result is that the pupils receive the learning opportunities outlined in the schemes of work without changes being made to account for the areas indicated as needing improvement as a result of the teachers' marking and assessment of their work. Marking is inconsistent within and between subject areas. There is no whole school marking policy. Each department has its own policy. The pupils are confused by a large variety of marking schemes. The pupils often have work returned without a clear indication of what they need to do next in order to improve further.

66. Procedures for the identification and assessment of the pupils with special educational needs are unsatisfactory. Processes to monitor pupils' progress are not sufficiently rigorous, and do not provide the necessary information for the school to evaluate the effectiveness of its special educational needs provision. For example, many of the targets given in the individual education plans of statemented pupils are imprecise, making the measurement of progress for these pupils difficult. Other pupils on the school's special educational needs register do not have individual education plans (IEPs) and therefore lack both personal targets and an explicit review process at which progress can be determined. The absence of a formal IEP review for these pupils also means that parents are insufficiently involved in the assessment process. There is no systematic collection of progress data and no agreed process for using this to judge the success of the teaching strategies used. Consequently the school is unable to plan effectively to improve its provision for pupils with special educational needs. The school uses an appropriate range of assessment strategies to identify and diagnose needs. Procedures for the annual

review of statements of special educational needs are thorough and meet requirements. There is a high level of parental involvement in this process.

67. Since the last inspection, the quality of care has improved as the school provides increasing support for the pupils. The effectiveness of assessment and monitoring academic progress has not sufficiently improved and is still a clear weakness. Procedures for identifying and assessing the pupils with special educational needs are also weak, as reported as the time of the last inspection.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

68. The parents' views of the school are positive. They feel that the staff, including the headteacher, are very approachable and respond well to parents' concerns. A significant minority is unhappy about homework and the lack of information about their children's progress, and the inspection team found these concerns to be justified. A few parents feel that the school does not work closely with parents. The inspection team does not agree with these views. Tutors send letters of congratulation as well as concern to parents, and the school invites parents to work with staff when the pupils have academic or social problems.

69. The quality of information which the school provides to parents is generally satisfactory. The parents of new pupils are well informed about the school through a series of open days and meetings. The prospectus and annual governors' report provide helpful guidance to parents, but do not contain all the information that they should. Regular newsletters and a high quality termly newspaper celebrate the school's successes and give details of future events. Parents of Sixth Form pupils are kept well informed of their child's progress through termly letters and an annual report. Several aspects of information on progress of the pupils, other than those in the Sixth Form, are unsatisfactory. The school failed to produce interim progress reports, due to be sent out in the autumn term. Annual reports to parents contain little information about how their children can improve their work. Annual parents' evenings provide useful opportunities for parents to discuss progress, and, in addition, parents are able to meet with tutors and teachers at some formal meetings and on an 'ad hoc' basis. Parents of Year 9 and Year 11 pupils receive appropriate information about the options available at the next stage of their education. The school has not fulfilled its statutory duty to invite parents to sign a home/school agreement.

70. The involvement of parents has a very positive impact on the work of the school. The parent-staff association makes significant contributions through its involvement in the curriculum, the environment, fundraising, and social events. A good number of parents are also involved in raising considerable sums of money through the music support group. The school values the contributions of parent governors, and parents who help with extra-curricular sporting activities. Parents enjoy supporting the whole school end-of-term assemblies. Most parents view and sign the homework planners, and some use them as a means of communication with tutors and staff. Parents of pupils with a statement of special education need are involved in annual reviews. However, the school does not involve parents of pupils who are at stages two and three in the review process. This limits parents' understanding of how they can support their children.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

71. The headteacher and senior managers lead and manage the school very well indeed. This very clear leadership provides consistently high standards, with a successful

drive, since the current headteacher's arrival, to provide the most effective teaching and learning.

72. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. Since his appointment under two years ago, he has communicated a very clear vision for the school and closely involved staff, pupils, parents, governors and the community in implementing this vision. His leadership has been the most significant factor in the improvement and development of the school. The last inspection reported adequate management but 'variable' success in the school's aims being met. The new headteacher, however, has clearly galvanised the school's human resources to effectively deliver the four principles of lifelong learning, personal achievement, respect and community. The number of pupils on roll has increased considerably and the proportion of the intake opting for selective education in Plymouth has reduced. This is due to the growing reputation of the school in its community. The headteacher has marketed the school more effectively, increased the activities available to the pupils and ensured consistently improving examination results.

73. The headteacher is providing very clear educational direction for the school. He achieves this through a range of strategies: sense of humour; judicious praise; high expectations; and excellent relationships with staff, pupils, parents, governors and the whole community. He has quickly reviewed the effectiveness of the senior management team to create a smaller, more purposeful group, which focuses on attainment and progress. Daily briefings are held with all staff and thus levels of communication are very good. Management responsibilities are regularly reviewed to enable the school's priorities to be implemented quickly. Thus, appointments have recently been made for a teaching and learning co-ordinator, literacy co-ordinator and performance data manager - these posts reflect some of the school's current developments.

74. The Sixth Form has sound leadership. The head of Sixth Form and post-16 curriculum co-ordinator both give enthusiastic and well informed direction and have helped to create a positive and purposeful atmosphere that is widely valued by the vast majority of the pupils. In broad terms spending on the Sixth Form creates an efficient, cost-effective provision. Provision should be seen in the rural context of the school and the relative difficulty of access the pupils have to possible alternative provision. It should also be seen in terms of the improving quality of the school's provision and examination results and the positive role models that sixth formers provide for the rest of the school. However there is currently no formal system for comparing the attainment of pupils at entry with their final grades in the Sixth Form and such a system is required to give a full and accurate picture of the quality of education provided.

75. Staff with management responsibilities overall provide very good leadership. The deputy headteacher oversees the school on a day-to-day basis with care and strong management, thereby releasing the headteacher to monitor developments and be accessible to staff. This arrangement works very well. Senior staff have clear responsibilities and the confidence to implement change successfully. Subject leadership is very good in history, science, modern foreign languages, art, physical education and GNVQ. It is good in drama, English and religious education. The subject departments are becoming increasingly involved in monitoring teaching and evaluation, largely through the annual reviews of each department.

76. Governors provide good support for the school. They are fully involved in strategic and annual development planning. A number of arrangements successfully enable the governors to monitor and become involved in school activities: day visits by individual governors; feedback from departmental reviews; presentations by the curriculum

co-ordinator and other senior managers. The governing body is working hard to improve weaknesses in accommodation and resources as well as to gain benefit from greater delegation, such as in the building maintenance allowance recently awarded to the school. Overall, statutory requirements are met except in respect of collective worship, religious education in the Sixth Form, some health and safety concerns and the provision of some prescribed information in both the prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents. Also, parents have yet to sign the home/school agreement. The governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

77. The monitoring, evaluation and improvement of teaching is good. The recently appointed headteacher has successfully introduced an annual departmental review system which focuses on the quality of teaching. This process ensures that all teachers are closely observed by senior managers and departmental colleagues on a regular basis. Targets for improvement are agreed by the senior management team. The teaching and learning co-ordinator has also been heavily involved in surveying aspects of classroom practice - helping to identify aspects of best practice across the school. Performance data are carefully considered as part of the departmental review but the scrutiny of pupils' work is less rigorously addressed. The central involvement in lesson observation by the headteacher has helped ensure that his view of good and weaker teaching is clearly reflected in the work of the school. Where evaluation has uncovered weaknesses, strategies have been successfully put in place to improve performance. Examples of such strategies include the sharp focus now given to Year 8, where underachievement was suspected; the introduction of new information technology equipment and resources; the additional teacher allocated to the Year 11 mathematics course, to focus on pupils predicted to achieve a grade 'C' or 'D' at GCSE.

78. Development planning is very good. The absence of a school development plan was a major weakness in the last inspection. The current plan covers a three-year span and has many strengths. There is a clear process in devising the plan which involves all the appropriate managers and governors; detailed planning includes rigorous success criteria; achievements are noted regularly and the plan updated accordingly. Subject plans relate well to the overall school plan. Assessment and performance data are used appropriately in the targets set by the school and reflected clearly in the school's planning. Action taken to meet these targets is evident across the school and involves individual departments, various teams of teachers and individual senior managers. For example, the activities enacted recently to improve the performance of boys included: additional GCSE and A-level courses; new GNVQ options at Key Stage 4; action research by the teaching and learning co-ordinator; each department including this aspect on subject development plans.

79. Staff morale is very high in the school and there is an excellent shared commitment to improve the school still further. The capacity of the school to succeed in this regard is very high. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good, particularly the results achieved and the overall growth of the school. The weaknesses outlined in the last inspection report have been very well addressed, except that collective worship is still not in place and assessment, recording and reporting not sufficiently improved. The school has now put in place robust systems and strategies to secure further improvements, such as current efforts to set ambitious but achievable targets for all pupils across the school. The major factor in driving the school forward, however, has been the creation of an extremely positive ethos whereby staff and pupils feel they can achieve their best and are strongly supported to do this.

80. The school has a sufficient number of teachers to meet the needs of its curriculum. The match of qualifications to subjects taught is very good. There are also a number of

staff with overarching curriculum remits for areas such as teaching and learning, assessment and the community and these posts add strength to the school's mission to establish very effective teaching and learning practice in the school.

81. Within special educational needs provision, the co-ordinators are well qualified and experienced. Most of their support staff also have a great deal of experience and are effectively deployed to meet the range of pupil learning needs. Non-teaching staff make an important contribution to the work of the school. They are deployed appropriately. There is a fully trained technician for information technology who fulfils an important role in liaising with the feeder primary schools. Administrative staff provide good support to the teachers and senior management team. The deployment of an administrative assistant in the sixth form centre has also proven to be an effective strategy.

82. The provision for staff development is satisfactory overall. At present there is no systematic process for the induction of new staff and very little induction support for non-teaching staff, even in essential areas such as health and safety training for laboratory technicians. Staff development has tended to be 'ad hoc' in approach rather than reflecting whole school priorities. The staff development committee is now in the process of harmonising the diverse professional development needs of the whole school, individual subject departments and individual teachers. As a result, all staff are now undertaking training in information technology as a whole school priority. The process will be taken forward in a manner that is phased in relation to the amount of funding available. The development needs of non-teaching staff are recognised in these plans and already some training has been set in train to help their particular needs. The school has made adequate progress in staff development since the last OFSTED report. The organisation of a more systematic approach to staff development across the school is still in its infancy and the particular needs of learning support staff need a higher profile.

83. The school currently awaits new regulations before implementing a new programme of appraisal across subject areas. To date, appraisal has at times been linked to staff development and this had led to some worthwhile mutual observation of teaching practice and tracking of pupil experience.

84. The school's provision of initial teacher training is good. There is a clearly structured programme supporting a significant number of students from Exeter University and St Mark and St John, Plymouth.

85. The resources for learning are good. The provision of computers is good both in terms of quantity and quality. The dual use school and public library is very effective in promoting literacy and in supporting effective and challenging teaching in subjects. Particularly good use is made of it by English and art and its use by all subjects is on the increase. The provision of resources in curriculum areas is very good in physical education, good in art, English and religious education and satisfactory in all others with the exception of two. Resources are inadequate in design and technology and for GNVQ. The school also makes good use of resources beyond the school.

86. The school's accommodation is good overall. Good strategic planning and the efficient use of resources have enabled significant improvements to be made to the accommodation since the last inspection. The previous weaknesses highlighted by inspectors in the provision for design and technology, physical education and for the pupils in wheelchairs, have all been addressed. Also, further improvements to the sports facilities are planned, which are associated with the recent award of sports college status. A new block offers good accommodation for English, while the provision for physical education,

history and the library is also good and has a positive impact on learning. However, accommodation for art is currently inadequate and limits the quality of the pupils' work in ceramics and constructional materials. The accommodation for information technology is also inadequate, as the computer rooms are too small for the size of the groups using them. This limits the pupils' access to computers and the range of opportunities available to them.

87. The sixth formers now have access to a range of good subject based accommodation and a sixth form centre which they have helped to make into a vibrant social area. Access to information technology equipment, for private study work, is generally adequate except at times when timetabled information technology lessons make a heavy demand on resources. The library provides a good range of texts for most subjects and departments too provide a good range of learning resources for their pupils.

88. Financial administration and management are strengths of the school. Departmental reviews and regular audits feed into careful financial management which, in turn, relates closely to the school's development plan and its educational priorities. Over the last five terms a great deal of money has been spent on improving a drab environment. The current surplus from the delegated buildings maintenance funding is earmarked for further improvements to the environment. The governors are now fully responsible for aspects of the buildings and are sensibly reserving some funds for emergencies. The school's funding for provision for special educational needs has been used appropriately and with good effect. Other specific grants are used for their designated purposes. Spending over the last year has been clearly related to the school's educational priorities of enhancing curriculum resources, improving the environment, broadening the curriculum, introducing the new posts of literacy, assessment and teaching and learning co-ordinators and putting on a very large and successful extra-curricular programme, including booster classes.

89. Administration is efficient and it is unobtrusive with a minimum of disruption to the heads of departments or teachers. Regular printouts keep all relevant persons – including governors – informed of how the budget is being managed. The most recent audit report spoke highly of the school financial administration.

90. The best value principles of comparison, challenge, consultation and competition are employed carefully in the school's management and use of resource. For example, the school has opted for full delegation of the building maintenance grant under the new fair funding arrangements. This has vastly increased the funding available to improve accommodation and the governors are making judicious use of these resources to implement their programme of building works but also reserve a sensible contingency budget for unexpected occurrences.

91. The school is providing very good value for money. This is due to a number of factors: the school's income is below average; attainment of the pupils on entry to the school is average and they leave the school with above average examination results; the quality of teaching is strong; the quality of leadership is very high.

92. The governor's annual report to parents does not meet statutory requirements for special educational needs. There is no evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs policy and the report has no statement on access arrangements at the school for disabled people.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

93. The school should now:

1. Improve the effectiveness of assessment, recording and report, by:
 - improving the quality and consistency of marking;
 - ensuring common procedures and approaches across departments;
 - improving the information provided to parents on their children's progress;
 - using data on prior attainment to set more appropriate targets.(See paragraphs 64, 65, 67, 69, 79, 100, 116, 130, 144, 152, 158, 168, 176, 182 and 189.)
2. Improve the effectiveness of information technology across the curriculum, by:
 - ensuring that all departments are providing appropriate opportunities for information technology;
 - increasing the training available for teachers.(See paragraphs 11, 24, 110, 121, 144, 151, 152 and 159.)
3. Improve the programme for PSHE, by:
 - generating a policy and establishing a whole-school approach to PSHE;
 - improving the co-ordination and management of the programme;
 - using available specialist staff to deliver aspects of the programme.(See paragraph 40.)
4. Improve the programme for careers education and guidance, by:
 - integrating the programme into the curriculum;
 - improving the co-ordination of careers education and guidance;
 - providing a comprehensive programme for the Sixth Form.(See paragraphs 37 and 44.)
5. Improve the use made of tutor time, by:
 - developing a clear programme of worthwhile activities for this time;
 - ensuring that all pupils attend these sessions rather than attending lunch-time activities.(See paragraphs 46 and 58.)

The following issues should also be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Generating a comprehensive induction scheme for new members of staff (see paragraph 82).
- Improving the quality and arrangements for homework (see paragraph 30).
- Addressing health and safety concerns identified during the inspection (see paragraph 61).
- Increasing the opportunities for extended writing across the curriculum and for using mathematics in practical tasks and in solving real-life problems (see paragraphs 99 and 110).

- Meeting all statutory requirements, as outlined in the inspection report (see paragraph 92).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	198
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and the pupils	74

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	22	39	28	4	1	0

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 pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
	Number of the pupils on the school's roll	931
Number of full-time the pupils eligible for free school meals	93	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
	Number of the pupils with statements of special educational needs	67
Number of the pupils on the school's special educational needs register	229	0

English as an additional language	No of the pupils
Number of the pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of the pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	33
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	26

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.7
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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 the pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	89	86	175

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of the pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	63	63
	Girls	72	69	70
	Total	121	132	133
Percentage of the pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (63)	76 (66)	77 (65)
	National	63 (64)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of the pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (21)	51 (37)	34 (36)
	National	28 (34)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of the pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	36	62	65
	Girls	68	69	73
	Total	104	131	138
Percentage of the pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	60 (50)	76 (69)	79 (78)
	National	64 (62)	64 (63)	60 (62)
Percentage of the pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (21)	49 (38)	43 (44)
	National	31 (31)	37 (36)	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	94	85	179

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of the pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	39	89	89
	Girls	55	81	84
	Total	94	170	173
Percentage of the pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (52)	95 (94)	97 (96)
	National	46 (45)	91 (90)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43 (41)
	National	38 (37)

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

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

Number of the pupils 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	23	39	62

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	22	21	21 (17)	3	5	4 (3)
National	18	18	18 (18)	3	3	3 (3)

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 the pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	34 (20)
	National	73

Ethnic background of the pupils

	No of the pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	3
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	1
White	1101
Any other minority ethnic group	

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	61.4
Number of the pupils per qualified teacher	18

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	28
Total aggregate hours worked per week	652

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	28
Key Stage 4	22

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	17	2
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Financial information

Financial year	1998-1999
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	£
Total income	2,424,635
Total expenditure	2,382,593
Expenditure per pupil	2,223
Balance brought forward from previous year	59,107
Balance carried forward to next year	101,149

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,105
Number of questionnaires returned	434

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	50	6	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	42	50	5	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	26	62	5	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	56	17	4	1
The teaching is good.	31	59	4	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	43	21	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	39	7	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	53	41	3	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	29	46	18	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	41	50	3	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	49	6	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	45	45	5	1	4

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Almost all parents responding to the questionnaire and attending the parents' meeting had positive views of the school. They felt it is welcoming and supportive and that their children enjoy attending. They were pleased with the progress their children make and with the quality of teaching. Many felt that the school was clearly improving and that the new headteacher was moving the school forward well. Some parents had concerns about the amount of homework provided, information on their children's progress and the ways in which the school worked closely with parents. The inspection found that their concerns about homework and information on the pupils' progress were justified. However, the inspection team felt that the school was successful in working closely with parents.

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

ENGLISH

94. Key Stage 3 results in 1999 were close to the national average. The trend for the end of Key Stage 3 test results over the last four years has been close to the national average. Results are broadly in line with those of similar schools. Pupils in Key Stage 3 do not receive sufficient opportunities to produce extended writing for a variety of purposes as is required by the Attainment Target 3 (Writing) of the programme of study. Whereas the performance of girls in the Key Stage 3 tests was above the national average, the boys' performance was only close to the national average. The department has started, through its literacy programme in Years 7 and 8, to focus on enhancing boys' standards of achievement. Talented and gifted pupils are appropriately challenged and make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress. Over time pupils in Key Stage 3 make reasonable progress, and, given their average results at the end of Key Stage 2 on entry to the school, the department enhances their achievement.

95. The proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C in the English language GCSE examination was close to the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the English literature GCSE examination was below the national average. In both subjects girls attained above the national average for girls in English language and close to the national average for girls in English literature. Boys' attainment was well below that of the girls in the school and below the national average for boys both in language and literature. The difference in performance between boys and girls is larger than the national trend. The department has recognised this weakness and has started to deal with it with the introduction of booster classes after school. Talented and gifted pupils are motivated with appropriately challenging work and they make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. As in Key Stage 3, the pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to carry out extended writing for a variety of purposes. Pupils' progress over time is steady and their acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary to do well in the examinations is good.

96. At both Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils' performance in English, although close to the national averages, is below the performance of the same pupils in mathematics, science and other subjects. The English department does not use pupils' prior attainment to set individual targets in any meaningful way. Although the department has set overall targets, there are no individual targets with a clear statement on what each individual needs to do in order to attain his/her target grade. The recent appointment of a new assessment co-ordinator will help the English department in its use of data for setting appropriately challenging targets.

97. In 1999 all pupils entered for the A-levels of English and English literature attained a pass mark. The numbers entered are too small to be significantly meaningful in comparison with the national averages. In English seven out of nine pupils attained the higher A-C grades. In English literature half of the pupils entered attained the higher grades of A-C. Low attaining pupils are well supported. Given the average entry GCSE grades of the majority of Sixth Form pupils, their progress in the two-year course is at least good and, in literature, it is better. The oldest pupils in Year 13 achieve standards that are well above the national expectations. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, the pupils were able to discuss character with great knowledge and understanding of the Hardy novel that they had been reading. They were able to ask intelligent questions in trying to support their views with clear textual evidence.

98. Overall, the pupils can read and analyse poetry well. They are able to respond to the teachers' questioning competently and to use evidence from the text. By the end of Key Stage 3 they can read fluently a variety of texts including Shakespeare. They are able to discuss a Shakespearean story line and plot. They are not as effective in writing extended essays although their writing in English is largely accurate. By the end of Key Stage 4 the pupils continue to read fluently and to use textual evidence well. They are also able to delve more deeply into a text in search of ideas, views and opinions beyond the story line. Some have begun to write continuously with confidence although the majority are still not good at producing extended text for a variety of purposes. These qualities improve dramatically by the Sixth Form.

99. Literacy skills across the curriculum are at least satisfactory. Pupils can read and write with some confidence and understanding. Their spelling is largely accurate although the efforts put into enhancing pupils' spelling performance is not reflected in other subjects except in art where the teachers focus on spelling, handwriting and presentation. In information technology lessons the pupils use spell checkers intelligently. In most subjects the pupils develop a suitable subject-related technical vocabulary and they use the words learnt accurately. For example, in music, the pupils are particularly encouraged to use key words listed on the board in writing their responses to questions. Pupils do not get sufficient opportunities in English and other subjects to engage in continuous writing. This practice across subjects would help pupils write for a variety of purposes.

100. Since the last inspection, the English department has enhanced the pupils' examination results at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils' reading records are now used effectively to ensure a variety of reading experiences. A main weakness in the last report was the underdeveloped use of poetry. The teaching and learning of poetry are now strengths of the department and poetry is much enjoyed by the pupils. The difficulties in class management mentioned in the last report no longer exist. Two areas of weakness now exist: one mentioned in the last report was the lack of challenge in Key Stage 4 which is still an issue in extended writing. The last report spoke of the good procedures for assessment, reporting and recording. The department has not developed to take on the use of data on prior attainment in order to set individual targets for further improvements.

101. All lessons seen were at least sound and more often good or better. In the Sixth Form teachers challenge the pupils effectively in well prepared and well structured lessons. At both Key Stages 3 and 4, the teaching is structured with a clear focus on enhancing examination performance. The main weakness in the teaching seen at Key Stages 3 and 4 was the lack of opportunity for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop ideas on their own. High attaining pupils are appropriately challenged as was seen in a Year 8 lesson where the teacher used extracts from Nelson Mandela's "Long Journey to Freedom" with progressively more difficult questions on issues of courage, love, goodness and freedom. Further extracts were given to the three pupils who had finished their task early. Six pupils with statements for special educational needs were given the task of creating a storyboard with the option of writing what they were able to write with the help of the learning support assistant. Gifted and talented pupils are challenged effectively as was seen in two poetry lessons where both teachers created opportunities for high attaining pupils to respond in further depth to the poems being studied. Pupils having difficulties in their learning are well supported as was seen in a booster Year 12 GCSE retake lesson after school. A group of pupils were taken through an examination passage step by step and helped to learn how language is used to formulate opinions. The teacher used clever questioning to ensure that lower attaining pupils learnt the technique necessary for their GCSE examination. In a Year 12 media studies lesson the pupils were given

considerable challenge through effective questioning that elicited and developed ideas. Media studies teachers have high academic expectations of their examination classes.

102. The department is well led and managed. Monitoring is effective with clear improvements having taken place based on the issues raised in the last departmental review. The learning environment is attractive with stimulating pupils' work displayed prominently in the classrooms and corridors. The main strength of the department is its ethos, which allows teachers to discuss teaching and learning co-operatively, exchanging ideas and spreading good practice. The teachers are also well informed in the latest research findings relating to literacy and to effective teaching strategies. Many of them take a keen interest in reading on how pupils learn best. The department's main weakness is in its failure to use pupils' data to set realistic but challenging individual targets.

MATHEMATICS

103. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are broadly in line with national expectations. In 1999, the national test results at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above the national average and well above those of similar schools. Girls did slightly better than boys. This has been the picture in recent years, with high attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. All pupils achieve well and make good progress during this key stage.

104. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades was slightly below the national average in 1999, but close to that of similar schools. Again, girls' results were better than boys'. Although broadly satisfactory, attainment has been uneven in recent years, with wide variations in the pupils' performance: girls' results have been particularly erratic and there is no evidence of steady improvement in line with national trends. The school has implemented strategies for improvement, and the predicted grades for the current year suggest that results should be better than previously. Achievement and progress are both satisfactory.

105. A-level results are good: examination grades are consistently in line with or above national expectations. Slightly more than half of the pupils following the GNVQ courses attain pass grades in application of number. Those pupils are entered for the highest level and the results are in line with expectations. Achievement and progress are good in the Sixth Form.

106. At Key Stage 3, the pupils make good progress in their development of basic skills. They consolidate their understanding of number, learn how to look for pattern in number and to make and test hypotheses. Their skills in algebra and data handling are well developed and they can work competently with shape and angle. By the end of this key stage, the pupils are well prepared for Key Stage 4 and for the mathematical demands of other subjects in the curriculum. A good example of applying number to decision making was seen in a Year 8 class where the computer was used to compare the price and weight of chocolate bars for best value. In a photography extension class, the pupils successfully applied ratio and proportion when calculating the strength of solutions. The least able pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress, and the highest achievers benefit from access to special courses devised to extend their abilities.

107. By the end of Key Stage 4, the large majority of the pupils have improved their levels of basic skills sufficiently to allow them to use mathematics effectively in science, geography, design and technology and art. The least able and the most able pupils continue to make good progress, but progress for average attaining pupils is inconsistent and achievement is uneven between teaching groups.

108. The quality of teaching is sound. In all key stages, teaching is characterised by sound relationships with the pupils. Teachers are diligent with marking and the setting of homework. They have developed an effective system for assessing the pupils' progress and for giving information to individuals about their work and how to improve. The quality of teaching, however, is uneven; there is too wide a gulf between the best teaching and the least effective. Some pupils benefit from well-controlled lessons where teachers ask searching questions and extend the pupils' thinking. In other classes, control is not strong, the lessons are pedestrian and the pupils are not given sufficient challenge. This applies particularly to the least able pupils at Key Stage 4 where some of the texts are not well matched to the pupils' abilities and the teaching approach is not suitable. Teaching at A-level is good: the course is demanding and the pupils are given a good basis for further study or for the application of skills in other subjects.

109. Pupils generally have a good attitude to learning. They are willing to work, particularly at Key Stage 3, and there are few instances of inappropriate behaviour which seriously affects progress.

110. Teachers are given clear curriculum guidance and have enough resources to teach the National Curriculum effectively. The resource base is not rich, however, with little opportunity given to the pupils to consider the use of mathematics in the world of work or to use computers.

111. Since the last inspection, the department has improved considerably on assessment procedures and homework policy, and an extra teacher has been employed in Year 11 to try to improve the GCSE results. The monitoring of teaching is insufficient, and the department is not making enough use of information on pupils' abilities on entry to the school.

SCIENCE

112. Science is a strength of the school. Biology GCE A-level results for 1999 were excellent, with a large group achieving well above national average results: all entries passed the examination and half achieved an "A" grade. Chemistry and physics A-level results matched national averages with chemistry having good entry numbers in contrast to only four pupils in physics. At GCSE, virtually all the year group (95 per cent) is entered for the double award science exam and in recent years science has been one of the school's best performing subjects. Both boys and girls have achieved excellent results which were well above the national averages and differences between their scores have been no larger than the national difference. Very few pupils fail to receive a grade. These excellent results have been consistent over the last three years. The pupils' science assessment results at the end of Year 9 in 1999 were equally strong with their average point scores consistently well above both the national average and those for similar schools, and again, differences between the boys' and girls' results has been consistently minimal over recent years. The results, which have been consistent over the last three years, show a considerable improvement over those achieved at the time of the last inspection. Compared with similar schools, results overall are well above average.

113. Pupils enter the school with more or less average Key Stage 2 science assessment results. Given the high levels of achievement at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13, progress at all key stages is clearly good or very good. This high level of learning and progress is still very evident in lessons and in the pupils' books. The pupils are gaining new knowledge and understanding at a good pace and in the majority of lessons, they are working hard at

understanding and being able to apply this information. The majority of the pupils are interested in their science, especially biology, and they work well in lessons. Pupils know what they are doing and why, and their attitudes to learning are generally good and, quite often, very good or excellent. The pupils with special educational needs make good progress, as do those who are gifted and talented.

114. The quality of science teaching is very good overall: in over half of all lessons it is very good or excellent. Only very occasionally is the teaching unsatisfactory. Teaching is strongest at Key Stage 4 where it is very good or excellent in four out of five lessons. The teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is consistently good and deployed within the school to good effect. Their enthusiasm for the subject and willingness to expand upon ideas and use interesting anecdotes is often evident and supports learning well. Teachers' planning is based upon good schemes of work and allows the pupils to build upon earlier work. Expectations are generally high for both behaviour and learning, teachers' relationships with the pupils are good and lessons start on time and run at a good pace. In virtually all cases good use is made of the time available.

115. In some of the best lessons the teachers simply and successfully bring together a full range of conventional strategies to bring out the best of their pupils and produce very good learning. In some cases, however, teachers use other strategies to develop good understanding and motivation. For instance, in one Year 10 physics class, the teacher set up a role-play situation to get the pupils to act out the passage of electrons through a wire at various different temperatures. A simple task, but a very well targeted one which enabled the pupils to really understand what was happening. In a Year 13 biology lesson, the teacher used news events on genetic screening and GM foodstuffs to guide a good and discursive seminar-style lesson through many of the syllabus issues associated with heredity and genes. The teacher kept to the syllabus well and the lesson covered what he had set out to cover, but the lesson also fully involved the pupils and took them into good social and moral issues.

116. In a small proportion of lessons, however, there are some weaknesses. For example, in some chemistry lessons, the work is too examination-oriented and too abstract with few references to real life and little relevance for the pupils. This does not help good understanding. Similarly, across science as a whole, marking is not always as helpful as it might be for the pupils and there is insufficient information technology in the pupils' science work. In the very small proportion of lessons where the teaching is unsatisfactory, expectations for the pupils are too low.

117. Throughout the school, the pupils' learning in science is generally good or very good. They are acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding, working hard and showing interest in what they are doing. Learning is strongest at Key Stage 4, where it is very good overall and always satisfactory or better: in four out of five Year 10 and 11 lessons, learning is very good or excellent. There is, however, a small amount of unsatisfactory learning at Key Stage 3 that occurs when the teacher has low expectations. Pupils throughout the years show that they can concentrate and persevere in their work and that they can work at a good pace with understanding.

118. The management and leadership of the department is very good. External examination data is monitored and analysed and positive actions have resulted which should improve teaching. There is a good departmental development plan and there are good schemes of work which guide the teaching. Health and safety in the laboratory is generally good although there are some storage and training issues for the storage and

handling of chemicals. The department has addressed the issues in the last inspection and progressed very well since then.

ART

119. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national expectation. The pupils enter the school with a wide range of previous knowledge and experience of art; their knowledge and understanding of art in Year 7 is below national expectations for their age. The very good teaching of fine art and basic art skills from Year 7 ensures that by Year 9 they have made good progress and are attaining well. They work imaginatively from their research into the work of a wide range of art movements and styles. They make good gains in their literacy skills, because of the clear emphasis which teachers place on annotation and note-taking, throughout the key stage.

120. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was well above the national average and amongst the highest in the school. The trend of results over the past three years has been firmly upward, with the rise in boys' results being more significant than that of girls. The gap between boys' and girls' results has closed to eight per cent, against a national gap of more than 20 per cent in 1999. There is also a strongly rising trend in A-level results, with the 1999 results being above the national average. The pupils studying for the advanced GNVQ in art and design also achieve very good results. The 'personal studies' of A-level pupils indicate a very high level of attainment. They show very well developed research and investigation skills, backed by high standards of literacy and presentation. The very good teaching and the commitment, interest and enthusiasm of the pupils, ensure that all make very good progress through their examination course work.

121. The extensive resources used by the teachers enable the pupils to study art in many cultures, from Aboriginal and American Indian, through European Renaissance and the Asian cultures, to the work of Impressionists and the many modern movements of the 20th century. The excellent knowledge which teachers have of their specialist areas of art is fully employed. The pupils learn the skills of drawing, painting, modelling and construction through their research and through the exercises set in Key Stage 3. They explore perspective through box constructions inspired by artists such as Van Gogh and Hockney. They develop colour mixing skills using a study of Constable, an understanding of physical movement through a dragon videotape and the skills of mono-printing using the bold images of 'pop art'. The GCSE coursework challenges their investigation and making skills effectively. They learn the technical and creative skills of life drawing, studying artists and sculptors such as Giacometti, Picasso, Rodin and Moore. They use acrylic paints and spray techniques, inspired by the work of Warhol and Lichtenstein. In the Sixth Form, the pupils show considerable drawing skill in their photo-realism portraits. Their researches are extensive and personal, revealing very well developed creative and technical skills. The very good teaching at all key stages ensures that the pupils are prepared for the intellectual and creative demands of GCSE and A-level work. They do not make effective use of information technology in lessons, because the computers lack the power to handle up-to-date art software and teachers lack the skills and training needed to manage information technology in art.

122. The quality of teaching in art is very good across the school. The teachers have very detailed knowledge and understanding of the subject and plan effectively for the various courses. Expectations are high indeed and this leads directly to very good creative efforts by the pupils. Time and resources are used well in difficult accommodation.

123. The department is led by a knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic head of department, who gives a clear sense of direction to a skilled team. The very high quality of leadership results in very high standards. The team work well together to promote high standards of work and behaviour. They do this in accommodation which has very poor storage arrangements and a room which is wholly inadequate for the three-dimensional work undertaken there. None of the specialist areas have control over available or artificial light and this restricts the observational work undertaken by pupils.

124. The department has made a very good response to issues raised at the last inspection. Teaching has improved considerably at all key stages; examination results have improved rapidly and there are no outstanding health and safety issues. The department does not yet have appropriate resources to deliver information technology in the curriculum and there is an urgent need to review all aspects of accommodation.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

125. By the end of Key Stage 3, the pupils achieve average standards and they make sound progress over the key stage. Their knowledge and understanding of the subject is above average as is their ability to manufacture products in a range of materials. However their ability to generate, develop and modify ideas when designing is often below expectations and reduces the overall progress they make.

126. By the end of Key Stage 4, the standard that the pupils achieve both in class and in their examinations is well above average. They make very good progress over the key stage. In the 1999 examinations 60 per cent of the pupils gained A*-C grades compared with 49 per cent nationally and the number gaining the highest grades was above the national average. This represents a significant improvement over the results of the previous year and is part of an improving trend over the past three years. Standards are highest in food and textiles, yet have improved significantly in resistant materials and are now average. Boys achieve standards that are above the average for boys in design and technology yet the girls achieve standards that are well above the average for girls. Both the boys and the girls achieve higher standards in design and technology than in most of their other subjects at GCSE.

127. Standards are above average at A-level and were well above in the 1999 examinations. While standards are slightly below average in the current Year 13 home economics group, they are above average in Year 12, which also includes an A-level design and technology group. Sixth Form pupils show good enquiry and evaluative skills, support arguments well in discussion and in design and technology they work confidently in a range of media. At Key Stage 4, the pupils show good research skills and attention to detail in planning how their products will be made. There are individual examples of good use of graphical skills and the use of computers to model ideas. However, in most instances at Key Stages 3 and 4, the pupils' graphical design, modelling and computer skills are under-developed. Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress in the subject.

128. The pupils' attitudes to learning are always good and are very good at Key Stage 4. The pupils enjoy their work, concentrate well and show good levels of independence, particularly when working on their ideas. They demonstrate good levels of responsibility and form very good relationships with teachers and the other pupils. However, opportunities for initiative are often limited by the nature of the tasks set at Key Stage 3.

129. The quality of teaching is sound at Key Stage 3 and is good in the Sixth Form. It is good and often very good at Key Stage 4. The standard of teaching has improved since last inspection. The teachers are experienced and are enthusiastic about their work. At Key Stage 4, the teachers have high expectations. Lessons are well structured and good pace and clarity of purpose enhances the pupils learning. Good feedback is provided by teachers on the progress the pupils make and on how they can improve. This successfully raises the pupils' expectations and the standards they achieve. Consequently, GCSE coursework often shows good attention to detail. For example, an electronic alarm system was housed in a well-designed case to form a professionally finished product. Where the teaching is less successful, insufficient emphasis is placed on progressively developing design skills at Key Stage 3. For example, a Year 8 textiles lesson focussed on developing manufacturing skills to produce a badge, with insufficient support in developing the design skills necessary to generate the pupils' ideas. Also, too great an emphasis is placed on the acquisition of knowledge and understanding rather than its application, which reduces creative opportunities.

130. At Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, examination courses are well led and managed. However, at Key Stage 3 there are weaknesses in the leadership of the subject, with insufficient co-ordination across material areas. This limits the extent to which learning is progressively developed. There is also insufficient monitoring of the pupils' progress and the use of data to set targets for improvement. Good progress has been made in improving the accommodation for the subject since the last inspection. However, insufficient modern computer equipment and limited graphical resources reduce opportunities in these key areas.

GEOGRAPHY

131. In the current Year 9, the majority of the pupils are on target to achieve standards in line with what is expected nationally and a small minority are achieving higher standards. The pupils' attainment is best in their knowledge and understanding of a range of places and in their ability to apply geographical skills to their study of those places. Given the pupils' overall attainment on entry, these standards are satisfactory.

132. In the GCSE examinations in 1999, attainment at A*-C was well below the national average with boys' attainment very far below that of girls. This forms part of a two-year trend since the change in the GCSE syllabus. Standards should be higher and the department has now taken appropriate steps to remedy this, such as more structured fieldwork and more targeted revision. The completion of the scheme of work remains a priority here. Lesson observations and scrutiny of work indicates that the standards of work of the existing pupils in Years 10 and 11 are much higher than in previous years. Their geographical knowledge and understanding and skills are good, they are well versed in examination technique but their recall and use of case study material is a weakness.

133. At A-level, examination results in 1999 in relation to pupil ability were good. This represents part of a strong trend over the past three years. This good standard is being maintained in the attainment of the pupils in the current Years 12 and 13. Pupils can explain complex issues like the impact of human activity on the natural environment, such as the effect of measures to deal with the flooding of the Mississippi River.

134. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, are making reasonable progress in their learning in all years. In a Year 10 lesson, higher attaining pupils demonstrated their competence in analysing the complex geographical problems associated with an ageing population whilst lower attainers made progress in their

understanding of the issues. In several Year 9 lessons, the pupils competently applied their geographical skills to the study of how Japanese hi-tech industries operated. In all years, the pupils show good knowledge and understanding of place and a good level of geographical skills. The pupils are less secure in locating the places they have studied in relation to each other. For example in a Year 7 lesson, the pupils were able to explain how the problem of pollution of the River Tyne had been solved but were unsure where it actually was in the United Kingdom.

135. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Standards at GCSE have fallen but this is being addressed. This is balanced by the improvements that have been made in the quality of the accommodation for geography and in the increased opportunities for fieldwork.

136. The quality of teaching in geography is always satisfactory, and frequently good, at Key Stage 3 and GCSE and consistently very good at A-level. This has a positive impact on the standards achieved by the pupils. There are a number of strong features of the good teaching. One is good teacher knowledge, as seen in the continual and precise use of geographical vocabulary in lessons. A second is very good management of classes. In a mixed ability Year 11 lesson, for example, the teacher broke down the work so that all the pupils could tackle a series of tasks easily. Good time guidance and individual support enabled all to quickly reach a good understanding of the characteristics of the lives of immigrants in Birmingham. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good in all classes. The main weakness in teaching is the marking of the pupils' work at Key Stage 3 and GCSE which gives insufficient guidance to the pupils on what they need to do to improve their work. The pupils' attitudes to learning are good at Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level. Pupils in examination classes have good note sets which reflect their commitment to their studies. Many pupils in all groups are keen to respond to teacher questioning and to offer their own geographical ideas.

137. The management of geography is sound. The department has an appropriate focus on issues for development, in particular on raising standards at GCSE and making much greater use of information technology. It makes good use of the resources available, particularly of up to date material but there is no formal departmental system for monitoring teaching and learning in geography.

HISTORY

138. Attainment at the end Key Stage 3 is in line with the national average. Girls have consistently achieved higher levels than the boys and, in 1999, they achieved levels above the national average. By the end of Key Stage 3, the pupils can identify the key features of the periods studied and they can empathise with the people of the time, for example, with the indigenous people of America and their struggle for survival. They can select and extract information from text and video in response to written questions, and with teacher support they consider source material in the light of its reliability. Their independent analysis of source material is weak, however, and written responses often lack development. Higher attaining pupils demonstrate a growing understanding of the links between an event and subsequent changes.

139. The attainment of the pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 is below the national average. The number of pupils gaining grades A*-C in GCSE is well below the national average. Results are recovering after a poor year in 1998, when girls performed less well than the boys. The number of the pupils gaining grades A*-G is in line with the national average. Attainment in work seen is higher than that reflected in the GCSE grades. The

pupils gain a sound body of knowledge relating to the development of medicine over time and are able to make links across periods and to identify key moments of change. They can identify motive and its links with later actions, as with the development of the American West. They can respond to written questions and are developing their research and observational skills. Responses tend to be limited however, and lacking supporting evidence. Source analysis is lacking in depth. Oral responses are generally more analytical, benefiting from teacher encouragement to develop statements further. Higher attaining pupils produce work reflecting accuracy and greater detail. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are developing an understanding of the periods studied, though their responses to questions of causation are generally superficial. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

140. The overall attainment of pupils who continue to study history to A-level is in line with the national average. The number of pupils taking the examination are too low for reliable comparison with national averages, but the proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades is rising, and the results for 1999 are in line with national average. The pupils develop their skills of analysis and they can identify links between events and across borders, for example during the Cold War. They support their statements with evidence and recognise that events may have several contributing factors. They are developing their understanding of the periods studied, but are over-dependant on the teacher for guidance.

141. Teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form. In all lessons seen it was satisfactory and in all lessons there were good elements. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and this enables them to respond to their pupils' needs effectively. They deliver lessons with enthusiasm that reflects upon the pupils, and the pace is generally brisk. Teachers make good use of question and answer to assess pupils' re-call and understanding, though more time and higher expectations are required for the pupils to develop their responses further. Lessons are well managed and effort is made to vary teaching strategies and to encourage pupils to work co-operatively. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on castles, the pupils were required to use their knowledge of medieval defence to design their own castle. The range of visits and fieldwork, and the extra revision classes arranged for pupils indicate the commitment of the teachers to the success of their pupils. Assessment procedures are being developed, though at present there is insufficient involvement of the pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 in self-assessment or in the understanding of their achievement. Homework is set regularly and develops from the lesson itself.

142. The attitude and behaviour of pupils is good, particularly at Key Stage 3, and in the Sixth Form. Pupils show interest in their work and generally remain on task with little need for teacher intervention. Pupils are quick to respond to questions and work co-operatively with each other. There is little evidence of pupils re-drafting or improving work after it has been assessed, and many pupils appear over-dependant on their teacher for guidance, preferring to be provided with information rather than seeking it for themselves. In Year 11, the pupils are less motivated and boys, in particular, demonstrate a lack of urgency and creative effort in their class work, although behaviour remains good.

143. The management of the department is very good. The teachers work as a team and there is a clear commitment to the success of the pupils. Examination results are carefully reviewed and steps are taken to investigate areas for improvement. The ethos of the history department is clearly demonstrated in the high quality of display both within and outside the classrooms, which stimulates interest and applauds pupil achievement. The limited time allocation in Year 9 presents a challenge to the teachers in the depth of coverage of the national curriculum and in the opportunities presented to the pupils to achieve the higher national curriculum levels.

144. Since the last report there has been a great improvement in the environment of the department, with greater cohesion and communication between staff. A-level grades have improved, although numbers opting to follow the course have fallen. The use of visits and fieldwork has increased and there is a better selection of texts in Key Stage 3. The use of information technology is still underdeveloped, but there has been some improvement. The analysis and use of source work is still to be developed further, and although work has begun, there is still scope for improvement of self-assessment procedures, particularly at Key Stage 3.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

145. At Key Stage 3 there has been a significant improvement in standards. Standards are in line with the national expectation. More than three quarters of the pupils have been assessed by teachers as achieving level 5 or higher in the end of key stage teacher assessments. (This is an increase from only 17 per cent in the previous year.) Some of these teacher assessments, however, appear over-generous. Standards achieved by the oldest pupils currently in Year 9 are in line with expectation. A significant number of younger pupils are entering the schools with skills which are raising attainment levels. The pupils are making good progress.

146. At GCSE, standards are in line with the national expectation, although not all the pupils follow an examined course. Many pupils with access to information technology at home use computers to present their work but opportunities across the curriculum in school are limited. The oldest pupils, currently in Year 11, have limited opportunities to use computers to enhance their learning across the curriculum. In taught information technology lessons, standards achieved are in line with the national expectation.

147. In Years 12 and 13, information technology is taught as part of a key skills programme, within business studies and at both GNVQ advanced and intermediate levels. Information technology also provides limited support for other subjects in the curriculum. Pupils are able to use information technology resources as effective tools to enhance their learning. Pupils are interested and involved in their learning and make satisfactory progress. Standards are in line with national expectations.

148. The pupils in Year 7 use the Internet with confidence to research aspects of Roman history. They select pictures and text and combine them to create leaflets and information sheets. In Year 8, the pupils select survey data to incorporate in a spreadsheet and in another class use pre-prepared data to search for cars using such attributes as maximum speed, fuel consumption or price. In Year 9, the pupils can finish the project folder for a study of information technology use in a local supermarket. The scope of some of these activities is limited for the most able pupils, some of whom find the software available to them on the network limits what they can do. For example, a pupil in Year 7, who had used a presentation package in his primary school, found the work he was asked to do unchallenging.

149. There have been significant changes since the last inspection in resourcing. A new network has been installed and there are further new resources awaiting installation following the inspection. The school will have resources giving a ratio of 1:5, considerably better than the national picture (1:8). There are, however, difficulties with access for whole class groups. Larger groups have to share resources in often crowded conditions. Some essential software for the delivery of the National Curriculum (Curriculum 2000) is not available on the school network. The school is considering a move away from industry

standard software tools to “freeware”. This is a retrograde decision. The network is very well managed by a team of teachers and a technician. They effectively support teaching and learning. The technician also provides technical help for the local primary schools.

150. The quality of teaching at GNVQ is good. The teaching is well organised and effective. At Key Stage 3 teaching with information technology is sound and good at Key Stage 4. The best teaching makes good use of resources to enhance and extend learning. Where teaching is effective, the teacher encourages the pupils to explore the software and to share their experience, excitement and enthusiasm with the group. In a science lesson, for example, the pupils used temperature probes with some precision to record cooling curves of hot water. In an information technology lesson the pupils modelled the market factors in launching a new soft drink. In a small minority of lessons the pupils are achieving higher standards at home than at school.

151. At Key Stage 3, there is a planned programme and scheme of work. This provides a clear progression in skills but there are few opportunities for the pupils to use these skills in the wider curriculum. Expectations of pupils, as autonomous users of the technology, are not yet as high as in the revised National Curriculum. The planned training of all teachers in this area is raising expectations and demands for access. In the library, four networked computers give access to the Internet. During the week of the inspection, these computers had been set to provide immediate access to health education sites as part of National Science Week. This is an imaginative idea that attracts the pupils to explore the sites independently. Use of the computer facilities at break times, during the lunch break and after school is impressive. Access is unrestricted and is used on almost all occasions to capacity.

152. Two teachers jointly manage information technology. This arrangement leads to satisfactory leadership. The network is effectively managed. Assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory and unreliable. There is a need, which the school is addressing, for teachers to receive further training. The use of information technology across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. This is due to insufficient attention being given to information technology as a learning tool in most departments.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

153. Most pupils study French and German at Key Stage 3. Pupils of all abilities make sound progress and the number of the pupils attaining the expected levels 4 and 5 by the end of Year 9 is in line with what is expected nationally.

154. GCSE results have improved in French and in German since the last inspection. The number of the pupils achieving a GCSE grade in at least one modern foreign language is above the national average. The percentage of the pupils passing at grades A*-C is above average in French and in line with the national average in German. Far more girls than boys gain higher grades in French. There is no difference between girls' and boys' performance in German. Pupils make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4 in developing their listening, reading and writing skills. There are good examples of the pupils' extended speaking in French and German on tape. However, many pupils at Key Stage 4 still rely too much on written prompts in order to speak and few are able to initiate or maintain a conversation.

155. The school has maintained its good results at A-level in French and German. In 1999 there was a 100 per cent pass rate with a higher than average number of the pupils attaining high grades in French.

156. There have been improvements in most of the issues identified in the last inspection report. The pupils' speaking skills at Key Stage 3 have improved. Many are able to speak at greater length, because teachers use good strategies to help them memorise new language. The range of the pupils' reading has increased at Key Stage 3. Pupils' attitudes to learning languages have improved. In almost every lesson the pupils showed good concentration, behaved well and were interested in the work. Teachers speak French and German more consistently in lessons and this improves the pupils' ability to listen and understand the foreign language.

157. The quality of teaching is good overall and there are examples of very good or outstanding teaching in French and German throughout the school. The teachers are good linguists who plan their lessons well to include a good range of activities that help the pupils to learn effectively. For example, a language game enabled a Year 8 class of higher attaining pupils to demonstrate their well above average understanding and use of German tenses and word order. A well-structured lesson enabled a class of lower attaining boys in Year 10 to practise and perform role-plays very well in French and these were recorded on video. Year 12 pupils in French took part enthusiastically in a drama simulation activity and have also scripted, acted and filmed their own soap opera. The enthusiasm of the teachers and the very good relationships with the pupils in almost all lessons contribute significantly to the progress the pupils make. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen at Key Stage 4 when the pupils' attention was not effectively secured or the teacher did not expect the pupils to speak enough in the foreign language.

158. The assessment of the pupils' progress at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form is good. However, there are weaknesses in the marking of the pupils' work at Key Stage 3, when the pupils do not always understand how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve. There is no evidence of them redrafting their written work in order to improve it.

159. The department is very well led. Clear educational direction and well-informed planning contribute positively to the standards of teaching and learning. There are good opportunities for the pupils to take part in foreign links and exchanges which add purpose and interest to their learning. The pupils in the Sixth Form make good use of the Internet, otherwise very little use is made of new technology including computers to support the pupils' learning of French or German.

MUSIC

160. Attainment at A-level is in line with the national average, with a relatively large number of pupils entering the 1999 examinations and sitting a wide variety of papers. The present pupils in Year 12 show a lively interest in music that goes beyond the classroom, with the performing skills of some talented pupils already significantly above the requirements of A-level. Those pupils opting for music technology demonstrate considerable competence in mixing and computer sequencing.

161. The number of pupils opting for music at GCSE is amongst the highest in Cornwall with attainment above the national average except at the highest grades. Pupils, however, perform rather less well in music than in the other subjects they take. Almost all pupils approach their practical work with enthusiasm and much of their composing and performing has a mature sense of style. The vast majority of pupils are also keen to discuss their work, have well informed opinions and develop their answers to questioning with some facility.

162. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is in line with the national expectation. Although there is a wide spectrum of ability within each of the classes, the majority achieve appropriately, with some achieving well for their ability. Here too, most pupils are eager to discuss music, and have a command of musical vocabulary that is well above average.

163. Sixth Form pupils support one another as well as showing a real capacity for independent work. One pupil spent a good deal of his half term holidays recording and mixing the music of a local rock band while another spoke animatedly and knowledgeably about his love of the music of Purcell. In one lesson at Key Stage 4, a young composer was writing for a classroom ensemble, having used information technology to transpose the various instrumental parts. Members of his group offered advice as to how the piece ("Restrictive Freedom") might be improved and he was also encouraged to improvise over the main melody to create a more interesting sound.

164. At Key Stage 3, listening work is well focused. In one Year 9 lesson, many pupils effectively interpreted the mood of the blues in their words and melodies. They employed an appropriate range of instrumental sounds and were fully aware of the importance of listening to the development of good ensemble skills. In one Year 8 class, the vast majority were able to answer detailed questions about the structure of Andrew Gold's song "Lonely Boy". The quality of performance of some groups, however, was limited by their insecure keyboard technique, many pupils using a single finger to play either the melody and bass line or using a variety of awkward fingerings for the chords.

165. Music teaching is good throughout the school and the attitudes of the pupils are usually very positive. In the Sixth Form, one-to-one support and the use of preliminary investigative work before tackling listening exercises, leads to a high degree of success and consequent confidence. In these lessons, the pupils are treated as responsible musicians, and with both music teachers prepared to give up so much of their own time, opportunities for the development of musicianship beyond the requirements of A-level examinations abound. At Key Stage 4, close attention to the requirements of the examinations ensure that the pupils are well prepared, the vast majority knowing precisely what to do in order to improve their chances of success. In these lessons, good classroom management in terms of space and resources results in all pupils being able to work with the minimum of disruption.

166. At Key Stage 3, constructive use is made of the instrumental skills some pupils have developed outside the classroom. Praise, together with positive, encouraging marking is used to motivate the pupils, while skilful questioning enables the pupils' aural acuity and musical understanding to reach high levels. Teaching is most successful when these questions are tricky and challenge the more able pupils to develop their answers. It is less successful when the answers required are of a non-musical nature or when the teacher does most of the work leaving the class with a copying exercise that makes few demands. In instrumental lessons, many pupils have the opportunity of playing alongside their teachers giving them valuable experience as real musicians. In many class lessons observed, the special needs of individuals were well attended to. In one case, the views of a pupil with learning difficulties were sought and subsequently "relayed" by his classroom assistant, effectively integrating him with the rest of the class.

167. The department is well managed and its accommodation and resources, including information technology, are used fully. The provision of additional space has been the most noticeable improvement since the previous inspection and both accommodation and funding are now adequate. The provision and use of information technology at both Key

Stage 4 and A-level is very good, the equipment being kept in good order by two part-time technicians.

168. The department's work is well supported and monitored by the school's senior management team. Assessment procedures are thorough and include a valuable element of self-assessment and personal target setting at Key Stage 3. However as yet, limited use is made of assessment data to guide curriculum planning.

169. Extra-curricular and instrumental teaching provision remain significant strengths. The department organises in excess of 200 instrumental lessons each week, given by a team of 10 peripatetic teachers. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is also offered and support is good - the Year 8 concert involving the vast majority of the year group. A great deal of interest is also shown in a series of small scale platform concerts which have recently been introduced and for which the pupils "sign up". There are good, active links with both parents and contributory schools through the Music Support Group, and with professional organisations such as the Bournemouth Sinfonietta.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

170. At the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils achieve above national expectations. The more able pupils attain a good standard of work, planning a series of movements and performing them fluently. They also demonstrate appropriate application of skills in games. The pupils progress well through the key stage and make good use of their ability. Interest and levels of concentration are high except on very limited occasions. The learning of basic ball skills is difficult for some lower ability pupils and this affects their performance in some games.

171. The pupils reach a very good standard in GCSE physical education/sports studies. Over the last three years, the pupils have achieved well above the national average with a rising trend of success. In 1999, 81 per cent of GCSE pupils achieved A*-C grades with 100 per cent reaching D grade or above. For the non-GCSE physical education provision, the standards reached by the majority of the pupils at Key Stage 4 are satisfactory, with most pupils showing a marked improvement within the subject through Years 10 and 11. The only exception to this was a group of Year 11 pupils whose basic skills were weak. Motivation and behaviour are generally good and the pupils normally strive well to achieve.

172. A-level physical education was introduced to the school in 1999. The limited amount of work seen in Year 12 indicates a good standard with the pupils showing good theoretical knowledge and an ability to apply it to practical situations. The course work shows good progression from Key Stage 4 and the pupils are achieving well.

173. Most pupils have a good attitude to their work in physical education and participation is high. The enjoyment, liveliness and support for others in the class are noticeable with real encouragement and celebration of success. Girls and boys work well together, all showing good awareness of safety issues. The pupils are good at officiating and are willing to take on roles of responsibility in lessons and during extra-curricular activities. This is especially true for the pupils who are working towards their Junior Sports Leaders' award.

174. Since the last inspection, A*-C grades in GCSE physical education/sports studies have improved from 37 per cent to 81 per cent. The time given for physical education at Key Stage 4 has increased and facilities for the subject have been developed. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is still broad but this is not detrimental to standards due to the high

quality of teaching and learning. There is no evidence of poor listening at Key Stage 4 – levels of interest and concentration are good.

175. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. The teachers know their subject well and they plan interesting, effective lessons that motivate the pupils. This was exemplified in a Year 10 handball lesson. Pupils were given a variety of activities well linked to their ability. The dynamic activity and the standards achieved were a direct response to well judged teaching within a purposefully constructed lesson. Excellent use of demonstration enabled talented Year 9 girls to learn triple jump techniques and improve them very quickly. Management of the pupils is very good throughout the department. In a Year 8 outdoor education lesson, a large class was organised and inspired to take up a variety of physical challenges. Due to the quality of the planning and the management of the pupils, all were engaged in planning, performing and evaluating their solutions to the problem-solving activities - not a minute was wasted. The pupils were extremely enthusiastic and noisy but very stimulated and thoughtfully engaged. Few weaknesses were evident. In one Year 10 badminton class, most pupils were very passive and the teacher failed to motivate them until late in the lesson. Sometimes, too many skills are introduced to the pupils and few are consolidated. Standards were affected when a non-specialist teacher taught a Year 7 netball lesson. Lack of expertise prevented him from using appropriate practices to improve poor skills. In all classes, expectations are high and the pupils respond accordingly.

176. The leadership of the department promotes very high standards. The team creates a strong, positive ethos that permeates to the pupils. The area buzzes with activity and enthusiasm. The whole department is involved in regular review of aspects of its work. Assessment is identified as an area of development. They are aware of the need to improve their existing paper based system and are exploring a new information technology system that will include monitoring and target setting.

177. Accommodation is good and enables the wide range of activities to be offered. It is well used and effectively allocated. Resources are of good quality and are well maintained. Links with other schools and outside organisations are utilised to maximum advantage. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities offered to all the pupils and there are also inter-tutor group and inter-school competitions in a variety of games.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

178. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations. By the end of the key stage, the pupils have developed an understanding of some of the practices and beliefs of the major world faiths. They have a basic understanding of the design and function of places of worship, for example the mosque and the church, and they consider the role of faith in the lives of believers. They consider the links between culture and belief and use practical examples to demonstrate understanding of the use of symbolism in daily life, as was seen in a Year 8 lesson on festivals which involved the presentation of food. Pupils are building up a basic understanding of Christian belief and its celebration of key stages in the lives of people, for example, marriage and birth. Pupils can identify similar roles played in other faiths and recognise that people of different cultures have similar needs. Pupils are provided with the opportunities to consider ultimate questions, such as the purpose of life, and to investigate alternative ideas of creation and the nature of God. The pupils are encouraged to develop their own responses to such questions and to recognise that different viewpoints are valid and may change over time.

179. The attainment of the pupils who sit the GCSE short course in religious education is very good. They supplement the core course with additional homework and results in 1999 recorded 100 per cent A*-C grades. Over the last two years the results have been well above the national average. They are able to make clear links between belief and lifestyle and have a secure understanding of the main tenets of the Christian belief.

180. Attainment in the core religious education course is in line with expectations for the school certificate. Pupils consider contemporary issues in the light of different beliefs, religious and non-religious, and more able pupils can give reasons for the development of these beliefs. Pupils discuss well, can identify reason, and can support their arguments with logic. Written responses lack this depth and are frequently superficial and limited in analysis. Pupils of lower ability and those with special educational needs meet the targets set for them. Pupils of higher ability who do not choose to take on the additional requirement for the short course GCSE, do not achieve their potential in depth of understanding and knowledge of religions.

181. The attainment of pupils who chose to study the philosophy of religion and Buddhism at A-level, is good. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher grades in 1999, is above the national average. All pupils who sat the exam in 1999 achieved grades at least in line with their other A-level subjects and for half the pupils it was a higher grade. Pupils achieve a sound understanding of the principle beliefs of Buddhism and its role as an alternative lifestyle. They investigate the philosophies that have developed to explain mankind's place within the universe and consider the questions that surround the existence of God. They reflect on the question of religion and morality and begin to view objectively the various responses to the question of suffering. Their use of specialist vocabulary is good.

182. The quality of teaching is good, and in some lessons it is very good. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory. Teachers have a well-researched knowledge base and lessons are well planned to encourage progression. Teaching strategies are varied to encourage participation and interest, and there is much use of group work to support weaker pupils and to enable the pupils to develop their understanding of the ideas of others. The department treats the opinions of all with respect and as a result the pupils develop good communication skills and treat the beliefs of others with respect. Homework develops from the lesson and is regularly set, although it is limited in quantity. As a result of the limited written work, assessment and monitoring of progress day-to-day is minimal, although there are good end of unit assessment tasks. As yet there is no direct link with the attainment targets of the agreed syllabus. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and make good progress. Teachers have a good rapport with their pupils and as a result they are confident and open in their responses. Teachers introduce new ideas and abstract concepts, such as resurrection and re-incarnation, from the standpoint of the pupils' own experience, enabling them to make reasoned growth in understanding.

183. The attitude and behaviour of the pupils in religious education classes is good. They are mutually supportive in group and paired work, and concentration is good. Attitudes in the Sixth Form are very good, in particular in a Year 12 group who approach new ideas with interest and a high level of determination. The presentation of written work of the majority demonstrates care at Key Stage 3, although at Key Stage 4 it is less satisfactory. There is little evidence of the pupils seeking to improve their work once it has been marked and some work is left unfinished despite teachers' requests that it is completed.

184. The management of the department is good. The department has a clear scheme of work and a detailed handbook. There is a clear commitment to provide the pupils with opportunities not only to become aware of the diversity of belief, but to relate this belief to human experience. Resources are well used and the teaching environment is stimulating and multicultural. The department makes a very good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

185. Since the last inspection there has been an improvement in the time allocation in Key Stage 4, and statutory requirements here are now met. In the Sixth Form, although A-level is taught, there is no provision for religious education for all, so statutory requirements are still not fulfilled. Schemes of work have been developed to reflect the locally agreed syllabus although these will shortly require updating. The short course in religious education is now offered to the pupils in Key Stage 4. The A-level grades have improved since the last inspection and take-up rates are good. The GCSE course is a valuable extension for the more able pupils, but there is still further development required to enable more pupils to take part in the examination. There is good use made of artefacts within the department, but little use is made of outside visits or visitors.

DRAMA

186. Standards in drama are high and the subject is a strength of the school. At Key Stage 3, the pupils are achieving beyond the national expectation and making good progress. They create and perform drama that is imaginative and powerful. The pupils also appreciate and appraise drama with depth and empathy. Standards in GCSE examinations were above the national average in 1999 and around half the year group consistently study this subject at GCSE level. Both girls and boys performed better in 1999 than the national averages. Performance in drama is also strong when compared with other subjects across the school at GCSE. The A-level course is also popular and results in 1999 were in line with the national average, a third of the candidates achieving an 'A' or 'B' grade. Pupils of all abilities perform well in drama, achieving their best through strong encouragement and challenge. The pupils with special needs at all key stages make very good progress.

187. The quality of learning in drama is high. The pupils are closely absorbed in their work and concentrate hard. They bring good creative effort to their work and apply previous drama knowledge and skills well. This was apparent, for example, in a Year 13 lesson on the play "Road", where the pupils used all their previous improvisational experience in enacting monologues from the text. The pupils are clear about ways to further improve their performance work and, for example, criticise each other's improvisations with alacrity and sensitivity. As their confidence develops, the pupils feel secure enough to take risks and experiment with different modes of presentation. A GCSE lesson on "The Seven Ages of Man" illustrated this aspect of the pupils' learning: they improvised a scene in a maternity unit using mime, strong facial expression and well-timed words. There is a high level of commitment to the subject. For example, during the inspection week a fire alarm sounded during a drama lesson but the pupils continued their text work immediately on returning to the drama studio.

188. The quality of teaching is consistently good and at times very good indeed. There is very good interaction with the pupils and strong energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by all the teachers of drama. Subject knowledge is good and the teachers build actively on the pupils' ideas and contributions. The teaching is strongest in the Sixth Form, where the teachers have greater opportunities to tackle work at depth. Across all key stages, however, the pupils are rigorously challenged to deepen their thinking and performance by

committed and, at times, inspirational teaching. A Year 8 lesson illustrated many features of this strong teaching: the teacher had successfully generated a wide range of creative ideas related to ceremony and ritual; groups of pupils fashioned scenes using imaginative movement, costumes, masks and music; the lesson concluded with an atmospheric performance which met the teacher's high expectations. The teacher used time well and very much delegated full responsibility to the pupils, challenging them to employ the widest range of drama strategies in their group scenes. The quality of teaching impacts positively on the pupils' learning and ensures rapid progress.

189. The subject is well managed and has clearly developed and improved since the last inspection. Over the last three years, results at GCSE and A-level have improved and there have been major developments in accommodation, with a new purpose-built drama studio established. There are good opportunities for the pupils to perform in the regular productions and this will clearly help improve their drama work. There are also good links with professional theatre companies which also contribute to the raising of achievement. The use of assessment information to inform planning is a weakness and the department is planning to address this.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

GNVQ

190. The school currently offers art and design, business, health and social care, information technology, leisure and tourism and manufacturing at advanced level in the Sixth Form. In business it is offering a single award course as well as the full award; and in information technology, single award only. In business, health and social care and information technology it is piloting the new GNVQ specifications. It also offers leisure and tourism at intermediate level and there is a small number of intermediate level pupils in all other vocational areas except information technology. The school has introduced Part 1 GNVQ in information technology as part of the Key Stage 4 curriculum for the first time this year.

191. Over the past two years, the percentage of pupils gaining the advanced GNVQ qualification has been above the national average, to a significant degree in 1998 and to a lesser degree in 1999, despite a decline in the average percentage points score for each pupil in 1999. The results were best in art and design, health and social care and leisure and tourism. The percentage points score per pupil was slightly above the national average for the relatively small number of pupils on intermediate courses with particular good results in business.

192. Well over 50 per cent of current Sixth Form pupils are involved in GNVQ courses. Over 30 per cent within that group of pupils combine GNVQ with other subject options. The work of the majority of current advanced level pupils is at least in line to gain the full award at the end of the course with a significant number of pupils producing work of distinction and merit standard in all options, most particularly art and design, health and social care and manufacturing.

193. Most of the advanced level pupils show considerable initiative in seeking and handling information from a variety of sources and in its presentation, often employing information technology to good effect. For instance this was much in evidence when health and social care pupils researched social issues such as abortion, the impact of disease and the production of learning games to suit the needs of particular children. The most able pupils make good use of technical language and plan and select information appropriately.

This was evident in information technology where pupils worked confidently on the application of systems analysis to organisation of the school canteen and made a good analysis of the impact of information technology on approaches to management in the Tamar Bridge project. All areas have good links to local business and community organisations. Those links are no better illustrated than in the activities of art and design pupils who have skilfully responded to a range of commissions from various businesses and community groups in the locality. For all but the most able pupils at A-level, skills of evaluation require further development.

194. The work of the Intermediate GNVQ pupils is generally in line with the national average. Most show commitment and enthusiasm for what they do. The leisure and tourism pupils show a good appreciation of the various stages involved in applying for a position in the tourism industry and were able to prepare well for simulated interviews with a local member of the business community. Skills of evaluation need considerable further development by almost all the pupils and some do not always make an effective selection of relevant information available to them.

195. The attainment of both advanced and intermediate pupils represents good progress on from their GCSE grades.

196. The majority of the current group of pupils taking GNVQ information technology in Year 10 are working to the national average with a significant minority in line to attain distinction or merit grades at their current rate of progress. Particularly good work is evident in data display and analysis.

197. The development of pupils' key skills of communication and numeracy is generally satisfactory. There is good application of information technology as a key skill across a range of assignments in the various vocational areas. This includes very effective use of word processing, the use of graphs and charts to display information and the use of the Internet for research purposes.

198. Since the last inspection there has been an overall improvement from satisfactory to generally good levels of pupil attainment, progress in learning and the quality of teaching in GNVQ.

199. The teaching in all the lessons seen at both key stages was good. All teachers have good subject knowledge. They have high expectations of the standards their pupils should achieve and the quality of their presentation. In the best lessons observed, teachers planned the opportunities for learning well and supported individual pupils very effectively in pursuing their particular areas of interest. Lessons are sometimes less effective when too heavy reliance is placed on pupils' individual work and too little on whole class teaching. The accommodation gives good support to the kinds of learning demanded by GNVQ. However there are a number of important health and safety issues to address in the manufacturing area. There is also a shortage in the number of dedicated computers available to some vocational areas such as leisure and tourism.

200. On the Advanced GNVQ programmes the pupils generally make good progress over time. They respond well to effective teaching and in several lessons observed they made very good progress. For instance, this was observed when they researched and then made masks in art and design and when they reflected on the need for team work on the production line in manufacturing.

201. The progress made by most intermediate level GNVQ pupils is good but some are held back in leisure and tourism by having to learn in mixed classes with A-level pupils. A number of those intermediate pupils also find it difficult to cope with the increased personal responsibility they have been given for organising their own learning.

202. The GNVQ courses are very popular with the pupils. They enjoy the range of work and the opportunities provided for ongoing assessment of their progress. They value the chance to work on topics of personal relevance. Most respond with considerable responsibility and trust placed in them. They have very constructive relationships with their teachers. This "learning partnership", as several pupils describe it, is reinforced by the provision of residential experiences, course-related visits and the annual events to celebrate pupil achievement.

203. Very good leadership by the coordinator is a key strength of GNVQ. The department has a strong sense of purpose and direction, clear structures that inform practice in all major aspects of the programme and strong team commitment its general principles. The pupils' learning assignments are both interesting and accurately reflect course criteria, and Key Skills are integrated effectively into them. A significant number of pupil programmes contain an effective combination of GNVQ and A-level courses. The assessment procedures represent excellent practice and ensure that pupils have their work marked accurately and in conformity with course criteria, and that advice and support is given on how to target future improvement in their learning. The many good links with local business and the community in general are built very effectively into pupils' learning assignments. Work experience is well organised with access to placements both one day per week and an annual block of time. The department has been recognised as a centre of good practice by the examining board and it has received financial support from the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) for developing the key skills programme.

204. GNVQ provision is a strength of the school and provides a valuable educational experience for pupils with a wide range of needs and interests.

ECONOMICS

205. Economics is taught to A-level standard in the Sixth Form. The percentage of the pupils achieving A-E grades was below the national average in 1999 but well above that figure with a hundred per cent pass rate in each of the previous two years. The percentage of the pupils achieving A and B grades was at the national average in 1999 but significantly above that figure in the previous two years.

206. The current standards of attainment of the older pupils are above national expectations. From lessons observed and examples of their work, most of the pupils are on course to achieve B or C grades in the examination. Virtually all the pupils have a very sound grasp of topics such as theory of the firm and the range of macroeconomic factors connected with fiscal policy. The most able pupils, who form a majority of the class, can readily relate theoretical economic concepts to contemporary issues. This was evident from observing a lesson on the topic of the previous day's budget and issues connected with 'overheating' the economy.

207. Progress of learning in lessons and over time is good for most of the pupils. They respond well to very good teaching that displays sound subject knowledge, sets clear learning objectives, helps them to understand complex ideas and uses a range of strategies to retain their interest and keep them on task. The teacher marks work

accurately with reference to the subject criteria and gives positive and practical advice to the pupils on how they might improve the quality of their work further.

208. The subject is very well led. There is a range of effective departmental guidelines and strategies for teaching and assessing the subject as well as good development planning. There is a satisfactory number of textbooks to meet the demands of the subject and a range of very good supplementary resources including economics journals and contemporary press articles. Pupils are actively encouraged to bring any articles of interest they read to lessons and the teacher regularly uses them as learning resources for class discussion and analysis. The teacher ensures that he is regularly updated on the latest developments in the subject area.

209. Skilful teaching and good organisation combined with an emphasis on high expectations of the pupils which are largely fulfilled, make for a very effective subject area.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND BUSINESS

210. Information technology and business is currently taught as an option to GCSE level in Year 11. Pupils from the school were entered for the examination for the first time in 1999. The percentage of pupils achieving A*-C grades was well below the national average. The girls' results were substantially higher than those of the boys. The standards of the current group of pupils are much more in line with the national average although there is a wide spectrum of ability, including some pupils with a range of learning disabilities. A small minority of pupils are on course to achieve GCSE grades A* to B. Some of the pupils with learning difficulties were seen to struggle to keep up with the pace of learning and the deadlines within the subject. There is no significant difference in attainment between the girls and the boys.

211. Most pupils show a good understanding of the use of EXCEL to create graphs and develop their questionnaires and they carefully present personal projects on such topics as the communication of ideas and the creation and organisation of databases. They generally work very constructively together. The most able pupils produce high quality publicity for local organisations and make good use of writing frames as well as showing considerable imagination in their research work. The less able pupils find it difficult to evaluate the potential problems connected with the various applications of information technology and the general quality of their presentation and organisation of material is poor.

212. The standard of teaching is good. In lessons observed, the teachers showed good subject knowledge and their high expectations that the pupils should quickly settle down to work on their own were met. One teacher is a skilled network manager. Imaginative learning assignments link effectively with issues in the locality. Marking of work has become more accurate recently but assessment still gives little guidance to the pupils on how they might improve their grades.

213. The department has analysed its past external examination results in detail and drawn lessons from them to improve its teaching approaches and strategies for supporting individual pupils. The department is satisfactorily resourced in terms of text books and other printed resources. In a small minority of lessons, however, there are too many pupils for the number of computer stations available.