

INSPECTION REPORT

The Grove School
Market Drayton

LEA area : Shropshire

Unique Reference Number : 123580

Headteacher : Mr R W Arrowsmith

Reporting inspector : Mrs S R Richardson (1038)

Dates of inspection : 29th November to 3rd December 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708239

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school :	Comprehensive
Type of control :	County
Age range of pupils :	11 to 19
Gender of pupils :	Mixed
School address :	Market Drayton Shropshire TF9 1HF
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Appropriate authority :	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors :	Mr P Ingham
Date of previous inspection :	December 1994

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Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs S R Richardson	Equal Opportunities	Attainment & progress, Teaching, Leadership & management, Efficiency of the school
Mr G Hanniker, Lay Inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Attendance, Support, guidance and pupils' welfare, Partnership with parents and the community Staffing, accommodation and learning resources
Ms L Tumman	Geography	Curriculum & assessment
Mr D Lee	Mathematics Numeracy	
Mr J Hardy	Business Studies Economics	Non National Curriculum Key Stage 4, 6 th Form, Community
Mrs V Blackburn	Science	
Mrs T McIntosh	Music	
Miss G Biscomb	Special Educational Needs	
Mr M McGregor	Art	
Mr B Frederick	History	
Mr J Forster	English Drama Literacy	
Miss M Steeds	Design technology Information technology	
Mr M Davidson	Religious education	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social & cultural development
Mr M Pennington	Modern Languages	
Mr F Herbert	Physical education	

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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- The Grove School provides a secure and happy learning environment.
- Students attend and behave well.
 - Teaching is almost all at least satisfactory and over half is good. Some is very good and there are occasional examples of inspirational teaching.
 - The leadership of the school is outstanding, offering the students and the community real educational vision.
 - Teachers are committed, hardworking and enthusiastic, often conveying well their own interest in their subject to their students.
 - The school makes excellent use of the wider community, in the interests of students' motivation and learning.
 - It has a very broad and well-supported programme of extra-curricular activities including sport, music drama and opportunities for additional studies. It broadens students' experience of European issues through extensive visits and links.
 - It enriches the Key Stage 4 curriculum with a vocational programme, matching learning to the needs of a small number of students who would otherwise not achieve satisfactorily.
 - The school offers a very thorough careers education and guidance programme which helps students prepare for adult life and further study.
 - It encourages higher attaining girls, in mathematics and physics in particular, with the result that more than average numbers opt to take these subjects in the sixth form and are present in top sets in Key Stage 4.

Where the school has weaknesses

- Provision for information technology (IT) is inadequate in both quantity and quality of hardware available and in the use of IT in subject lessons.
- I. Academically, in most subjects, girls outperform boys, some of whom are underachieving.
 - II. The school continues to breach statutory requirements for the curriculum in religious education and information technology. It still does not provide a daily act of worship as required.
 - III. Monitoring of teaching and students' progress is still not sufficiently systematic. Heads of department in particular do not undertake thorough enough monitoring within their subjects.

The strengths of the school considerably outweigh the weaknesses. The governors' action plan, which will be sent to all parents or guardians of students at the school, will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

- IV. It has established a set of shared aims which inform planning and policy making;
- V. The cycle for long term planning is clear and the leadership of the headteacher makes it effective. However, heads of subject have not yet had sufficient training to help them manage the long-term development of their subjects.
- VI. Consultative processes have improved in the last two years in particular, continue to develop, and staff, parents and governors are involved in their implementation and review.
- VII. Targets are challenging, but achievable, and the staff is fully aware of their implications. Student targets are shortly to be introduced across the school, and those already in use are helpful and manageable.
- VIII. Systems are now in place for systematic review of teaching and learning by senior managers and heads of subject, but they are not consistently used. This is partly due to a lack of time and higher than average teaching loads for subject leaders, and partly due to their lack of experience of a strategic development role.

- IX. Students' standards at the end of Key Stage 4 in GCSE fell in 1998, but rose again in 1999. The fluctuation is in large part due to students' differing attainment on entry and to the reduced performance in the higher grades of boys in 1998. Standards in the sixth form rose in 1998 and 1999 in terms of the numbers of A level passes achieved and the number of students who gained university places, but their overall points score fell.
- X. The organisation of the curriculum has improved considerably in the last two years and a number of important further innovations are planned. There are, however, still deficiencies in the provision for religious education and information technology. Policies for all other aspects of the curriculum have improved and governors are involved and contribute well to this.
- XI. Teaching is now a strength of the school. Almost all is at least satisfactory, much is good and some is very good or excellent.
- XII. The school has taken effective action to improve students' opportunities for reflection and personal development, and further changes are planned. Students of all ages now show great pride in their school.
- XIII. Statutory requirements for a collective act of worship for all students every day are still not met.

Standards in subjects

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

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	Key	
			<i>well above average</i>	A
			<i>above average</i>	B
			<i>average</i>	C
			<i>below average</i>	D
			<i>well below average</i>	E
Key Stage 3 test English	C	C		
GCSE examinations	C	D		
A/AS – levels	D	N/A		

Results at the end of Key Stage 3 in national tests in all three core subjects (English, mathematics and science) have slightly improved in the last three years and are almost exactly average in comparison with national averages. In other subjects assessed at the end of Key Stage 3, this is also the case. Results in GCSE fell in 1998, when boys' results in particular fell dramatically. However, there has been improvement in 1999 with results coming back to, or close to, the national average. The school had its best ever year in terms of A level passes in 1999 and a higher proportion of the leaving students went on to further or higher education than ever before. However, there were fewer passes at the highest grades.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	Geography, music, physical education, religious education, history	
Years 10-11	Good		
Sixth form	Good		
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

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

In all, 227 lessons were seen during the inspection and 99 per cent of the teaching was at least satisfactory, with pupils making satisfactory and often good progress as a result. There was a high proportion of good teaching (57 per cent) and 13 per cent was very good or excellent. Only two lessons had teaching with unsatisfactory features and none was poor. In view of the unusually high proportion of satisfactory teaching, no subjects have been entered as 'least effective'.

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Good. Students show increasing self-discipline and self-esteem as they get older.
Attendance	Good. Curriculum initiatives have made school more interesting for all in Key Stage 4, reducing absenteeism.
Ethos*	Good. There is a friendly atmosphere, supportive of learning. Staff and students are committed to raising standards. Relationships are good.
Leadership and management	The Grove School is very well led. An outstanding and experienced new headteacher and well-organised governing body are giving the school a strong sense of direction and preparing it well for the next stage of its development.
Curriculum	Satisfactory overall. Provision for religious education and information technology is still not complying with statutory requirements. Innovations such as the Third Session and work related opportunities in Key Stage 4 are ensuring that students can make the most of their talents. The school is also effectively addressing the needs of the disaffected through its curriculum.
Pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory overall. Students' needs are identified early and good provision is made within the Learning Support department.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	There have been significant improvements in opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and all are now satisfactory or good. Opportunities to prepare students for life in multi-cultural Britain are sometimes missed.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Satisfactory. Staff have a considerably higher than average time in class. A pleasant site is well maintained. The sixth form benefits from its separate, good accommodation.
Value for money	Good. Results are improving, the ethos of the school is good and this is achieved on the basis of somewhat lower than average spending.

* *Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.*

The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not happy about
XIV. The way in which Year 7 students are	XIX. Behaviour of some students

<p>welcomed and settle in the school.</p> <p>XV. The good support which students receive throughout the school</p> <p>XVI. The extra help available to students preparing for GCSE and A level examinations</p> <p>XVII. The staff is very approachable</p> <p>XVIII. The school enables students to achieve a good standard of work</p>	<p>XX. The large amount of homework set</p>
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The inspectors agree that the arrangements to welcome and settle Year 7 students are good. We also agree that there is some evidence of poor behaviour in Year 7, but the school impresses upon students its expectations, with the result that students' behaviour improves consistently as they get older. The balance of homework set is satisfactory. The help and support available are good. There is a plan, already piloted, to make further improvements by tracking attainment and progress of students from January 2000.

Key Issues for Action

The governors, headteacher, senior management and staff should plan to move forward from this strong foundation to improve the school in the ways outlined below.

A. Attainment: raise the standards of attainment of pupils in the school, particularly the boys, by:

- XXI. reviewing the ways in which students are grouped for different subjects;
- XXII. analysing rigorously which tasks would best support desired learning outcomes;
- XXIII. using available information systematically to identify underachievement wherever it occurs;
- XXIV. tracking students' progress closely and involving parents in supporting learning targets;
- XXV. continuing to improve teaching by sharing widely the excellence which is present in some;
- XXVI. putting in place plans for curriculum change which engage all students in courses well matched to their needs. (see paragraphs 39, 44, 47-48, 59, 74-75, 149, 164)

A. Information technology: improve the curriculum co-ordination, training for teachers and the resources of hardware and software in school for students' and teachers' use, so that all can become confident, competent and independent users of these tools for learning. (see paragraphs 40, 58, 116, 148, 163, 174, 188, 203)

B. Training in management for heads of department: in order to meet better the future needs of the school in this development phase, ensure that subject leaders are trained in appropriate strategic management techniques such as data management and use, monitoring and tracking student progress. (see paragraphs 62, 75, 95)

C. Meet statutory requirements: respond urgently to the last inspection report, which highlighted the school's breach of statutory requirements in religious education and information technology. Make arrangements to meet requirements in relation to collective worship. (see paragraphs 44, 49, 61, 62, 86, 98, 186, 214)

In addition to the key issues raised above, the following less important matters should be considered for inclusion in the action plan.

- a) Increase the opportunities for students to take further responsibility for their own learning and for the community of the school. (see paragraph 28)
- b) Review the time allocations to subjects to ensure better provision for the second foreign language and physical education. (see paragraphs 46, 48, 198, 208)
- c) Carry out the plans to broaden further the opportunities in the sixth form. (see paragraphs 63, 90)

INTRODUCTION

c) **Characteristics of the school**

- 1 The Grove School is a mixed county school with 1132 students on roll, 145 of whom are in the sixth form. The school is growing in size: there was a large increase in numbers entering Year 7 in 1999 and more students stayed on into the sixth form. The school serves the small town of Market Drayton and is its only secondary school. It also serves a wide area of north-east Shropshire and some students attend from Staffordshire. The school is a focal point for the community and is used widely outside school hours.
- 2 The school has several competitors in the locality, drawing in some of the higher attaining students who might otherwise come to The Grove. In particular, there is a girls' grammar school about 12 miles away, and a boys selective school, at a similar distance, which has more of an impact on the intake than does the girls' school.
- 3 The area served by the school is predominantly low-wage with some rural deprivation, characterised by low expectations of education, poor access to facilities because of local transport difficulties and limited opportunities for employment to offer advancement. The proportion of students which is eligible for free school meals is about average for the country as a whole.
- 4 The intake has been genuinely comprehensive in terms of ability, social groups and aspirations and remains not far from balanced, but in recent years, the attainment of the students on arrival has reduced, falling gradually below the county's average. The local education authority (LEA) has, until this year, produced very helpful statistics following countywide testing, and these show that, since the time of the last inspection, students' verbal reasoning scores on entry to the school have slipped significantly. Numbers of students in the middle range of ability have varied considerably. The school ran its first summer literacy programme in 1999, recognising the greater learning difficulties some students face on entry to secondary school.
- 5 In 1998, the percentage of students with special educational needs was well above the national average, and this was an increase on 1997 figures. There are currently 36 students with statements of special educational needs, which remains above average in comparison with all schools nationally. There was also a further small increase in 1999 in the proportion of students on the school's register of students with special educational needs who do not need a statement. Students with statements of special educational need have a range of needs, from dyslexia and moderate learning difficulties to emotional and behavioural problems, and physical impairments such as hearing or sight loss.
- 6 The sixth form provision is college-like in style, but essentially part of the school. This is significantly changed since the time of the last inspection. Housed in a listed building adjacent to the main school, students are free to arrive and leave the premises as they wish as long as they follow the procedures of signing in and out. Attendance at lessons is compulsory and no contact time can be home based. There are links between a local college of further education and the local sixth form college, providing an extension to the range of subjects offered. Through a 'Third Session' arrangement, additional A level subjects are offered at the end of school days. For example, students are able to study psychology on site in two after-school sessions.
- 7 The school set itself new aims in the last school year. These focus on:
 - the comprehensive ideal – providing a high quality education well matched to students' educational needs
 - equality of opportunity for all
 - life-long learning
 - providing an appropriate curriculum.

- 1 The school has also set itself challenging targets for academic improvement: it met its 1999 target of 44% of pupils achieving five or more higher grade passes (A* to C) in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4. It is working to achieve 50% of such passes in 2000.
- 2 Other targets include:
 - acquiring Investors in People Award
 - acquiring the Society of Education Officers' 'Curriculum Award' (notification that this had been achieved arrived on the first day of the inspection)
 - acquiring the 'Schools' International Award' from the Central Bureau of International Exchanges and Visits
 - developing provision for information technology.

Key Indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3
for latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	117	103	220

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	59	69	64
	Girls	73	60	54
	Total	132	129	118
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	60(59)	59(62)	54(65)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	24(35)	35(43)	20(36)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	28(27)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	70	72	69
	Girls	77	69	63
	Total	147	141	132
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	67(62)	64(66)	60(77)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	60(62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	33(32)	40(39)	25(32)
	National	31(31)	37(37)	28(31)

¹

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	101	84	185

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	35	84	94
	Girls	45	81	82
	Total	80	165	176
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	43.2(37.9)	89.2(94.5)	95.1(97.9)
	National	47.8(46.3)	88.4(87.5)	93.9(93.4)

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

	Number	% Success rate
School	0	N/A
National		N/A

Attainment in the Sixth Form³

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

Year	Male	Female	Total
1999	28	37	65

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	14.8	14.4	14.6(17.6)	2.3	3.7	3.4(2.4)
National	N/A	N/A	18.2 (17.6)	N/A	N/A	3 (2.8)

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

	Number	% Success Rate
School	14	79%
National		N/A

Attendance

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

		%
Authorised Absence	School	7
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.4
	National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Exclusions

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

	Number
Fixed period	39
Permanent	0

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is :

	%
Very good or better	13
Satisfactory or better	99
Less than satisfactory	1

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

- 1 When the current Year 7 entered the school, the attainment of a third of the students in English and mathematics was below that expected of students by the age of eleven. For students with special educational needs, reading and spelling were the weakest areas. Over the last three years, attainment on entry to the school has deteriorated slightly, and it is now somewhat below average for the country as a whole. Attainment at the end of **Key Stage 3** in national tests in English, mathematics and science in 1999 is broadly in line overall with the national average for all schools, and it was average for schools with similar intakes. At the end of **Key Stage 4**, attainment in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**) examinations is broadly in line with the average for the country as a whole, but below average for schools with similar intakes. Because of much reduced performance by boys in GCSE examinations in 1998, the trend for the school appears static over the last three years. In the sixth form, in 1999, attainment is below average for the country as whole. However, students achieved the best number of **A level and GNVQ** passes the school has had for many years. The average points score for students entered for two or more A levels in 1998 was in line with the national figures. The school's performance for 1999, compared with the performance of students in schools with similar intakes, produces a reduced average points score of 16.3. This is below average, as students attained fewer of the highest grades in A level examinations.
- 2 Attainment in **English** improved in 1999 on results in the previous two years. It is close to the national average for all schools but in line with that of similar schools at the end of Key Stage 3. The school adds value to the attainment students had on entry, which is below the national average. In lessons, there is a clear difference between the attainment of boys and girls, and this was also the case in national tests. Boys are more reluctant to produce extended writing or to improve their spelling or presentation of work. By the end of Key Stage 4, examination results are still below the national average, but in 1999, there was a significant improvement over the two previous years. Girls, however, outperformed boys by a bigger gap than that found nationally. Lower attaining students remain lacking in confidence in speech and their writing is of inconsistent quality. Boys are particularly reluctant writers. Results in drama in 1999 are well above the national average. Advanced level results this year were in line with national averages. Theatre Studies' results in the sixth form are just below the average. In class, sixth form students display a wide range of attainment. Most can engage in mature discussion of literary topics. Students' progress is satisfactory overall at Key Stages 3 and 4; it is good in the sixth form. Occasional examples of unsatisfactory progress occur when lessons lack continuity, and this affects boys in particular. In Key Stage 4 in particular, students gain rapidly in confidence by acquiring appropriate language with which to discuss writing such as poetry.
- 3 Attainment in **mathematics** has been rising steadily over the last three years, at about the same rate as the national rate of improvement. At the end of Key Stage 3, results in national tests are now slightly better than the national average. In lessons, higher attaining students are above the nationally expected levels. At the end of Key Stage 4, GCSE results reached the national average, with girls gaining more higher grades than boys. Higher attaining students produced high standards of GCSE coursework but are not yet fulfilling the predictions, based on their Year 9 attainment, in Year 10. In the sixth form, students attained A and B grades in A level at the same rate as nationally, and the proportion of girls achieving these higher grades is rising year on year. Progress in mathematics is never less than satisfactory in Key Stage 3, and in three-quarters of lessons, it is good. In Key Stage 4, progress is good or very good in almost all lessons. It is generally good in the sixth form and often very good.

4 The results in **science** were close to the national average at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, but were below the average for similar schools. Girls performed slightly better than boys. Attainment in lessons is in line with the national expectation in the case of most students, and above it, for higher attaining students. At the end of Key Stage 4, in the double award GCSE science examinations, results in 1999 were well below the national averages in the higher grades of A* to C, and slightly below in the A* to G range. However, the downward trend in these results experienced over the previous two years was halted. Attainment seen in current science lessons was better than the GCSE results of the previous year group, but there was considerable inconsistency between groups. In the sixth form, students reached national average attainment in A level examinations in physics, but results were below average in chemistry and biology. In lessons, all students seen were attaining standards in line with course requirements for this stage of their courses. Progress in all lessons in science is at least satisfactory, and there are many instances where the progress of girls is better than that of boys. Best progress occurs when students are able to use everyday examples and previously learned work to appreciate new contexts. Science teachers use information about students' progress to track them through both key stages and this has a beneficial effect on progress overall.

5 Attainment in other subjects was as follows:

Subject	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Sixth Form
Art	In line with national expectation; development of painting skills is particularly good.	Below national average in the higher grades of A* to C. Girls improving steadily and very much better than boys, whose results declined in 1999. Standards rising in lessons	Above the national average with a 100% pass rate for the last three years. Students in lessons produce imaginative and expressive personal responses
Business & vocational studies	Not applicable	Broadly in line with national averages in business studies. GNVQ completion rates are better than national ones.	A level results are broadly in line with national averages. GNVQ results are better than the national average.
Design and technology	Standards in national tests below national average, but in line with national expectation in lessons. Girls attain above the national average, but boys continue to be below it.	Only 2/3rds of students entered for an examination and results were above the national average.	Standards improved somewhat between 1998 and 1999 and results are now about average. Work in class is in line with course requirements.
Information technology	Attainment is well below national expectations. Girls attain better standards than boys, but are still below the national average.	Overall attainment is below national expectations. Those taking a GCSE examination are in line with national standards.	6 th form students who take the RSA computer graphics course attain well and some gain a merit or distinction. A level students in Year 12 are attaining in line with course requirements.
Modern languages	Standards are below average in both French and German, but higher attaining students are on line for average results.	Overall standards are average when compared with similar schools. In the last three years, results in GCSE have improved in line with the national improvement. Attainment in French in 1999 was slightly above the national average, with German slightly below.	Standards meet course requirements and, in relation to the national position, A level results are average in French.
Geography	Standards are slightly below	Attainment in lessons and	A level work is in line with

	average, although a number of students attain above or well above average standards. Girls achieve better results than boys.	current work is in line with national expectations, although GCSE results are well below average.	expectations for the course. In 1999, all students gained at least a pass grade.
History	Standards are in line with national expectations. Girls are attaining better standards than boys.	The majority of students are attaining standards in line with national averages.	There are too few students to justify comparisons with national averages. All students in 1999 passed their examinations.
Music	Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with the national expectation.	Recent GCSE results have been satisfactory, although groups are very small. Standards for those following music courses are in line with national averages.	There have been no sixth form groups in recent years.
Physical education	Attainment in Key Stage 3 at least matches national expectations in hockey, football, dance and rugby, and exceeds them in netball and some hockey lessons.	GCSE results have improved since the last inspection and are now above the national average.	Not applicable, as involvement in sport and fitness activities is recreational only.
Religious education	Attainment is in line with the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus.	GCSE results in 1999, from a small group of students, were better than the national average.	Not applicable, as no course is running, other than for a small number who take A level.

Progress was as follows:

Subject	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Sixth Form
Art	Very good progress in ceramic work, at least satisfactory and often good overall.	At least satisfactory, and good in half the lessons seen. Girls are in the majority and make better progress than the boys.	Progress is good.
Business & vocational studies	Not applicable	Progress is at least satisfactory and some is good.	Progress is at least satisfactory and often good in the sixth form, and students use previous learning to improve current rates of progress.
Design and technology	All groups of pupils acquire and consolidate their subject knowledge, skills and understanding as well or better than expected	Progress is at least satisfactory.	Progress is good in design skills in particular.
Information technology	Pupils are not acquiring and consolidating knowledge, skills and understanding, as well as could be expected in Key Stage 3, as there is little planned progression and continuity.	Progress is unsatisfactory, as pupils are not experiencing all the National Curriculum programmes of study.	Students are making good progress in the A level course, although they have limited prior attainment.

Modern languages	Progress is generally satisfactory with girls making better progress than boys. Progress in the second language is unsatisfactory because of lack of taught time.	Progress is satisfactory for the higher attaining students and for those on the SCILL course, but some average attaining students do not build well enough upon previous work.	Progress is good with students using a range of resources to improve their grasp of the structure of the language.
Geography	Progress is generally good but, in Year 7, is slower than in the rest of the school, because of a shorter amount of teaching time. In Years 8 and 9, it is at least satisfactory.	Students make satisfactory or good progress in handling data in lessons and in fieldwork.	Students generally make good progress.
History	Progress is mainly satisfactory.	Higher attaining students make good progress and all others satisfactory.	Progress in all lessons seen and in students' work is good.
Music	Progress in Key Stage 3 is broadly satisfactory, and some good progress occurs in developing listening skills.	Progress of higher attaining students is good in composing and in performing. Progress in listening skills is limited because of the lack of breadth of experience of most students.	
Physical education	Progress is good across a wide range of activities.	Progress is at least satisfactory and often good.	
Religious education	Progress is at least satisfactory, and is often good, with substantial work done recently.	Progress in lessons is good and students work hard. However, progress over time is unsatisfactory because students do not receive sufficient lesson time.	Progress is good, helped by effective teaching, for the small number studying A level.

6 Levels of **literacy** at entry are slightly below the national average. Most students at Key Stages 3 and 4 show the capacity in lessons to speak about their work in a lively and open manner to each other and to their teachers, as in a Year 8 geography class where students were presenting the weather forecast. Listening skills vary according to how successful classroom management is in creating conditions to encourage the sharing of views. In some subjects, such as religious education and history, students enjoy the opportunity given for structured discussion. In drama, students of all abilities show themselves capable of reflecting in appropriate language on their own performance and listen attentively to the views of others. Most students read quite fluently and lack of reading ability is seldom an obstacle to learning. However, many, even amongst older and more able students, read without much expression. A relatively small number of students make use of an excellent school library to extend their reading and to do the sort of independent research which is encouraged for all students in geography, history, art, design technology and in the sixth form generally. A teenage reading group meets regularly in the library and members show the ability to read and discuss intelligently a variety of genres. Standards of written work vary considerably and are generally slightly below average. A lack of enthusiasm for writing inhibits the progress of some students of middle and lower ability, particularly boys, and their written work is often short and lacking in development. Spelling is a weakness at all levels. However, there are examples, particularly amongst more able girls, of high quality writing as in a Year 7 history group where a number of girls showed considerable understanding, a wide range of vocabulary and immaculate presentation in their writing about William the Conqueror. Most sixth form students can handle complex ideas in extended writing on their chosen subjects, as in a Year 12 Business Studies group writing on marginal costings. Information Technology is not used extensively in any subject area or key stage to enhance literacy,

though there are individual examples of good practice. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in reading and writing at both key stages.

- 7 For about twenty-five students, identified in the primary schools, literacy support was offered in the summer holiday prior to transfer through a summer school run by staff from The Grove School. This support continues as required after entry into Year 7 through one and a half hour's effective intervention per week, given both before and during the school day. A staff literacy group, recently established, is promoting literacy across the curriculum and is offering guidance on teaching strategies to the main subject areas.
- 8 Students' competence with and understanding of basic **number** and mental arithmetic since the last inspection has been maintained. They are able to work reasonably confidently and accurately with number, time and money, use percentages, fractions and decimals, and have a sound understanding of place value. Students demonstrate an acceptable level of mental recall of multiplication tables and associated operations. They use their number skills in other subjects where fractions, decimals and percentages are required. Students are able to read and interpret tables, draw graphs of information about climate in geography. They are also able to construct proportional arrows on a base map of Europe to depict the origin of tourists to Spain. Students frequently tabulate results from experiments in science and use and interpret bar and line graphs in history. Students in physical education use a range of measurements to assess standards attained in aspects of various sports. They can use instruments to measure and draw accurately in art and design and technology. A whole school policy for numeracy has yet to be fully developed and implemented. When in place, it will enable students to consolidate and develop these skills through regular practice and application in the wider context of other subjects. There is insufficient time available in mathematics lessons devoted to the development of mental strategies in order to develop students' confidence and competence. The promotion of numeracy skills in a variety of other contexts supports students' consolidation of number competence and confidence.
- 9 Students' attainment in **information technology** is below national expectations in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Attainment is higher and nearer to national expectations in communicating and handling information and modelling, but is well below in control and measuring. Overall progress is unsatisfactory across both key stages as students are given few opportunities to develop breadth and depth of experience through cross-curricular work. Attainment and progress are sound for students taking CLAIT and RSA computer graphics and for the Key Skills element for GNVQ students. Year 12 students taking the A level course are making good progress considering the low base from which they came.
- 10 Students with special educational needs in Year 7 are making good or at least satisfactory progress when working in small withdrawal groups with specialist help. Most are reading more advanced books and are working steadily through spelling lists and increasing their accuracy when tested. They are able to read for comprehension, using texts and questions which are gradually more demanding. The programme so far has not addressed the difficulties some have with handwriting or with longer pieces of writing.
- 11 By the end of Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4, all but a small minority of students on the register of special educational needs have raised their attainment by at least one National Curriculum level. They have some strategies for remembering how a hundred or more of the more common words are spelled. They are able to present their work well using word processing; for example researching leisure pursuits and preparing an informative leaflet about one of the activities.
- 12 Students on the register of special educational needs make satisfactory progress in lessons. When students of all abilities work together, students with special educational needs make less progress than in small group sessions, except in classes where there is additional adult help. When students are in groups of similar attainment they are able to make better progress in lessons when the teaching recognises the difficulties they have and planning takes account of this, for example in modern foreign languages and mathematics. In several lessons in mathematics and in some art and music lessons, students make good progress. Good progress is generally made when learning support assistants support students.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

- 13 Students' attitudes to learning are good. In almost three in every five lessons, their response to the lessons observed is good or better. A small proportion of the students needs encouragement from the teachers to keep them interested. Girls generally show more perseverance and concentration than boys do. Nonetheless, they all maintain attention, as observed in a Year 11 mathematics revision lesson, when a predominantly male lower attaining class worked diligently through the hour and made good progress.
- 14 Students behave well in and around the school. A minority of parents expressed concern about behaviour of the students and the inspectors agree it is not always satisfactory, especially in Year 7, but do not feel it is a cause for concern. Some students are boisterous and resort to rough play. There is congestion in the corridors and staircases when students change lessons and inevitably there is occasionally a scramble. However, the students are considerate and helpful to each other and to adults most of the time. This is particularly noticeable as they grow older: they show increasing maturity, self-discipline and self-control. Employers report back favourably on students on work experience with them. The last inspection noted that younger students lacked confidence. After three months into the school year this does not appear to be the case. They are settled and fully familiar with the school's systems.
- 15 Students respond to the code of conduct well. It concentrates on the positive in each person and rewards achievement, be it academic, effort or behaviour. The rate of fixed exclusions is falling, though the school takes students excluded from other schools. The school has not excluded anybody permanently for two years.
- 16 The school lives up to its motto of "working together" well, focusing on the students, the staff, the parents, the governors and the community. One good example is the decorating of empty shops in the town where the town council provides the materials and students do the work, with the teachers supervising. The students trust each other, as they frequently leave their bags unattended in break times. It very rarely causes problems. The staff also trusts the students, for example to use tools in design and technology, and they do not misuse any responsibility or privileges given.
- 17 Students work well together in pairs and in teams. In a Year 7 personal and social development lesson, for example, they prepared a mime in pairs to demonstrate what is involved in doing a job. Their peers were able to guess accurately what the pairs had in mind. They maintain teamwork, effort and concentration, for example in physical education.
- 18 However, the students' personal development is not yet more than satisfactory. They generally rely on the teachers' guidance for their work and do just sufficient research for their studies. Not many write extensively or read for pleasure, though the Teenage Reading Group is a regular and lively gathering. Most students are passive and diffident in drama and become self-conscious in modern foreign languages when they need to take risks. They take responsibilities when offered, for example, a few sixth form students mentor younger students and Year 10 students have 'buddies' from Year 7 in the spring term. The students are entrusted with considerable responsibility when staying at The Birks and a good number take the Duke of Edinburgh Award to silver, and a few to gold, level. They also represent their peers in the form, year and school councils where they mainly concern themselves with raising substantial funds for charities. Worthy as these are, few have higher level responsibilities to exercise extended leadership, for example for producing and editing a school magazine to a time scale. Students take pride in their school and show a clearly shared understanding of the school's purposes; this was lacking at the time of the last inspection.
- 19 Students with special educational needs, working in ones and twos or small groups outside class lessons, have good attitudes to their work, particularly Year 7 students. They understand the pattern of the lesson and settle quickly into the routine. They take responsibility for selecting what they will read and for ensuring that they get through each section of work. Older students are sometimes reluctant to follow the teacher's plans, but most concentrate well throughout a half-hour of intensive teaching. Some students have difficulties with behaving in an appropriate manner and need careful

managing, but in general, behaviour is good.

Attendance

- 20 Students' attendance is good at almost ninety-three per cent, above the national average for comprehensive schools. The last academic year shows a further improvement over the previous year. The first nine weeks of this term indicate the trend is holding. All the year groups achieve over ninety per cent attendance. The unauthorised attendance is similar to schools nationally.
- 21 The marking of registers was not always correct at the time of the last inspection and the system of marking the afternoon registers consumed too much office time. The marking is now correctly done and although the system is similar, an optical reader aids the collation of data. Furthermore, the system allows more efficient use of students' and teachers' time since, after the class register is taken, students get straight down to work. This cuts out one tide of movement of students and teachers from one part of the school to another.
- 22 The pastoral team work incessantly on impressing on the students the importance of good attendance in their education. They involve the parents too, who increasingly co-operate both by providing valid reasons for absence and by encouraging their children to attend regularly. The education welfare officer visits the school regularly and supports the tutor teams very well. He helps with advice and strategies for individuals and makes home visits if necessary. The contribution of the youth worker is also highly regarded. She organises a team of mentors who help individual students with attendance problems by providing personal support. The pastoral team either refers the students to her or the students refer themselves.
- 23 Students arrive in school on time. Although there are some variations in punctuality these are not excessive and if they are inclined to be unacceptable, the pastoral team and their helpers quickly focus on them.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

- 24 Teaching has improved since the time of the last inspection and is now a strength of the school. The focus on improving teaching in the intervening years has overcome the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection. The vast majority of lessons (ninety-nine per cent) is satisfactory, over half was good (fifty-three per cent) and thirteen per cent of lessons were either very good or excellent. The school has sufficient examples of high quality teaching to ensure that the improvements which have taken place are firmly based and can increasingly influence the practice of the whole school. The last report focused on the less than satisfactory teaching in Key Stage 3. There is no such discrepancy now, although the problems of inculcating good behaviour in Year 7 students have not disappeared. However, the fact that by the end of Year 8 and beyond, behaviour is good indicates that teachers have found strategies for improving behaviour in lessons.
- 25 Virtually all the teaching in English, mathematics and science is at least satisfactory. Over half is good in English, over three-quarters good in mathematics and over one third good in science, with some outstanding teaching in physics. In all three subjects, planning is good, schemes of work well thought out and work matched well to students' needs.
- 26 There were some examples of good or very good teaching in most subjects: in the personal and social education programme, which is taught by a specialist team, half was good. Significant amounts of very good teaching occurred in art, geography, languages, music, religious education and science.
- 27 In total, thirty lessons came into this category, and they were characterised by
- brisk pace and high expectations of what students can achieve in the time allotted;
 - secure subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject, conveyed well to the students;
 - very good relationships between teachers and students, with calm management of students' behaviour and work;
 - careful planning based on good schemes of work;
 - good understanding of the different ways in which boys and girls learn and the need to motivate both with the tasks chosen; this was particularly evident in outstanding lessons in physics and PSE.
- 1 In the good and very good lessons, teachers enable their students to make good progress by developing their range of knowledge, skills and understanding in parallel. Examples of this quality were numerous, and the extracts below highlight the best features.
- A geography lesson in Year 8, in which the teacher's own very good subject knowledge was evident, reinforced students' locational knowledge. Constructive criticism helped students to become more confident in their own geographical skills. There were high expectations for the whole range of students, whatever their attainment, and students' previous work was well known. The group of 24 students was very well managed and the good working relationships built up over the previous four terms, motivated them to make very good progress. All students were helped to contribute to a very good piece of group work, producing as an outcome well-presented weather forecasts. Students received very helpful feedback on their group work, which also contributed to the attainment of all and to the good level of progress.
 - In a physics lesson in Year 11, a top set consisting equally of boys and girls was taken through a rigorous revision lesson within the programme of study on energy. The lesson was very intense and conducted at a fast pace, giving a powerful sense of urgency to the revision work. The teacher kept a tight control on what went on, and by circulating around the groups during the time spent on a complex experiment, was able to steer students' thinking, reinforce their understanding of the relevant formulae and make good links with other work in environmental science. There was excellent and probing use of question and answer and of diagrammatical representation of the work on the whiteboard, so that students would be able to make notes to advance their independent examination revision. The teacher's personal style was dynamic and intellectually

challenging. Planning was excellent. The framework for the lesson was tightly structured. Excellent subject knowledge came through at all times, and the teacher conveyed her own enthusiasm for physics very strongly. The round-up of the learning done in the lesson at the end, though only lasting three or four minutes, was authoritative and had a major impact on students' understanding and progress.

- In a PSE lesson with a Year 10 group, opportunities were created for students to complete a series of challenges designed to make them more independent and express their own opinions more coherently. A very clear introduction, using flip chart and question and answer, ensured that all students knew what was expected of them during the lesson. The teacher adopted an excellent 'negotiating' manner which engaged and motivated all, whatever their attainment. The work was given high status. It was presented in such a way that no students would have considered not making the necessary effort. Excellent student management skills both with small and large groups enabled them all to feel included and valued, and gave them all the confidence to start talking. Students' questions were answered in an open, frank and honest manner and responses elicited sensible and animated discussion. Skilled interventions sustained the conversations so that all made excellent progress.
- In a Year 11 English lesson on poetry, with a second level set, a confident and experienced teacher effectively built students' confidence. Management of the group included a judicious mix of praise and encouragement with clear instruction from a practised repertoire of teaching skills. A variety of activities had been planned which threw responsibility on to the students, for example, by using one as 'the teacher' and calling upon others to write on the board, whilst the 'real' teacher acted as learning manager. Clear guidelines for the later conduct of group work were set, and, unusually, there was very good use of silence for students to reflect and prepare their own work. These techniques resulted in very good progress and the confident use of the specialist language for discussion on poetry.
- In a very varied Year 8 music lesson, a very clear presentation of what students were expected to learn during the lesson was made, reinforcing a common subject language. The lesson was very well planned and the teaching very well informed. Students' reactions were very skilfully handled, turning uncertainty into a positive response. Very good knowledge of the class was used to good advantage, encouraging students to build on their strengths and permitting an eager pupil to direct a class performance of a scored piece.
- A Year 12 mathematics lesson, the third in a sequence, covered an algebraic interpretation of series. The lesson objective was made very clear, and built upon the previous lessons very well, developing students' knowledge and understanding of the topic. Skilful use of questioning determined their level of understanding during the lesson and drew out their learning needs. Follow-up work was appropriate and enabled students to tackle the topic more independently. The teacher's subject knowledge was a key contributor to the students' very good academic progress.
- The modern languages department decided that, to motivate and enable good progress in French by boys, it would establish a mixed attainment all-boys group and monitor it closely to see if this improves their performance. In this Year 9 lesson, panache and presentational skills worked very well to motivate the boys. The lesson was entirely taught in French through continuous, skilful use of question and answer relevant to all students, and there was a mixture of humour, clear instruction and high expectations. Very good use of audio-visual aids such as the cassette tape recorder occurred, allowing good opportunities to develop listening skills. The overhead projector was also well used to stimulate comprehension, and teaching was not over-dependent on a textbook or the written word. Frequent praise encouraged students to keep trying and to improve their responses. The lesson succeeded very well in achieving its objectives.

1 The very small number of lessons in which there were weaknesses were unsuccessful because subject knowledge was not strong enough and planning did not take into account fully the needs of the students and their prior experiences of the subjects concerned. As a result, progress was at best satisfactory, and where students spent too much time chatting, unsatisfactory. Some lessons, which were satisfactory overall, did not have the pace and high expectations of the better lessons.

2 There is inadequate access to computers in many subjects, so that schemes of work, many of which, such as in history, are otherwise exemplary, do not make use of the opportunities for enhanced teaching and learning which computers offer. In languages, however, where use of the computer suites on a reservation system enables appropriate access, teaching offers good reinforcement of

language skills.

- 3 Homework is set regularly, and many parents expressed concern that there was a heavy workload, especially for students in Year 7. However, homework is generally appropriate, with only a few examples of trivial work instead of work to reinforce or extend classwork. Marking policies are interpreted in different ways in different departments, but much is supportive, giving students a clear idea of what they have to do to improve. A minority of marking fails to give this guidance.
- 4 Specialist teams teach personal and social education (PSE). The quality of teaching ranges from excellent to satisfactory, with half being good. Teachers ensure that students make gains in general knowledge and self-knowledge, personal confidence and work or study related skills.
- 5 Teachers working with individual students or with small groups of students with special educational needs have a range of strategies to help students progress in the areas they find difficult. In all the lessons seen in the learning support department, teaching was at least satisfactory, often good and occasionally very good. In the Year 7 literacy lessons, effective work includes reading, spelling and comprehension. Students have targets, tests are checked and a record kept of progress through the scheme. Students are expected to be independent, but there is constant support, encouragement and reward. The work meets the needs of all students, although not all are working at the same level. Reading aloud is encouraged individually and shared in early morning sessions with older students, but play reading when students need to listen and read with their peers, is not much used. In Key Stage 4, students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) have lessons planned to focus on particularly weak areas, using a variety of materials and approaches, including information technology. Opportunities are taken to prepare students for class work, for example by learning the names of the characters in Romeo and Juliet before that part of the curriculum is studied. Consolidating and revising spelling and reading are a strong part of the work to help to build the students' confidence and self-esteem. A visit to a garden centre by a small number of Year 11 students was used to stimulate discussion and to encourage students to think about marketing strategies and how the public is attracted to the centre. As part of work on advertising, this lesson elicited responses from students who are not easily interested in education or learning. The teacher's questions were well timed and well chosen, adapted to the mood of the students who understood and respected her expectations. Overall, whilst teaching meets the needs of students with special educational needs, it does not always challenge some and there is a shortage of attractive resources and materials and of computer software which students enjoy.
- 6 In class lessons where teachers are not assisted by another adult, the work often does not meet the needs of students with special educational needs. Teachers are aware of the difficulties the students have through the individual education plans (IEPs). Most teaching is sensitive and supportive and, in particular, students have good individual support in some art, design and technology and physical education lessons. Planning in business studies and in some history and geography lessons takes account of students' special educational needs but lessons are rarely planned to use a sufficiently wide range of resources or strategies to help students to become independent and successful.

The curriculum and assessment

- 7 There have been significant improvements in the curriculum since the previous inspection. These are based upon the clear principles and values, which now form the basis of a developing curriculum, intended to meet the needs of all students. The subjects and courses taught constitute a broad and balanced programme at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Good equality of opportunity is provided for all students, apart from those students in Years 8 and 9 who take two modern foreign languages and consequently lose half of their physical education time. Time allocations are in most cases adequate for the courses, although the provision for double science of four hours per week is insufficient. Although information technology (IT) has adequate time, there is very little provision for the use of IT across the other subjects of the curriculum. At Key Stage 4, religious education is included although the time for this is limited and does not permit adequate coverage of the Agreed Syllabus. In these respects the curriculum does not meet statutory requirements.

- 8 The curriculum for Key Stage 3 includes the full range of subjects of the National Curriculum together with personal and social education and drama. All but two students with special educational needs follow a modern foreign language course in Year 7 and a small proportion of boys and over half of the girls study two languages in Years 8 and 9. From the outset, form groups are located in one of two 'sides' or bands, each of which contains students of the full range of prior attainment. Students on the school's register of special educational needs are placed in both of these sides. Teaching groups are formed initially taking account of friendship patterns although grouping by attainment in the subject setting is increasingly used as the key stage progresses. English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages set from Year 8 and geography, history and religious education group on their attainment in the three subjects jointly in Year 9. Some of these groupings (in English, science, German and the humanities) have resulted in top sets with few boys. These arrangements have, overall, contributed to the greater effectiveness of the revised curriculum
- 9 The modern foreign languages department operates some single-sex groups in French in Years 8 and 9 and physical education teaches in single-sex groups throughout the key stage. Although the recent move to one-hour lessons has been successful in most respects, it is a disadvantage for the teaching of modern foreign languages where lessons are too infrequent and one lesson a week for the second modern foreign language is unsatisfactory.
- 10 At Key Stage 4, students have a broadly based common curriculum, occupying three-quarters of the available time. Three optional subjects or courses are added which give students an opportunity to follow courses in humanities, expressive arts and vocational studies. Students are given careful guidance in making these choices. In addition the school offers the opportunity to study for an extra qualification in art, law, drama or German after the end of the school day in what is called the Third Session.
- 11 The sixth form curriculum includes a very broad range of over twenty A level and AS subjects some of which are offered in the Third Session. This broad provision results in some small groups in Year 13. In Year 12, provision is further broadened by the addition of GNVQ courses in business studies and health and social care. The school recognises that the current provision does not meet the needs of all students who may want to study in the sixth form and has well thought-out plans to broaden the vocational provision offered in the next academic year
- 12 All students in Year 12 follow a general studies course, resulting for many in the ADSAN Youth Award, and some in Year 13 obtain a fourth A level award in general studies. A level students are timetabled for four periods per week in each subject and in addition have a fifth session which is directed by the subject teacher and takes the form of supported self study. The work for these sessions is carefully prepared and organised by subject staff. Fourteen Year 12 students are currently benefiting from a seven-week block of study in Bordeaux as part of the 'Dialogue 2000 project'. They are kept in touch with A level work in The Grove by regular e-mail and facsimile contact. There is no religious education in the sixth form, other than at A level, contrary to requirements.
- 13 At all stages, the curriculum is supported by a large number of extra-curricular activities. There are many sporting activities including an opportunity for sixth formers to acquire a community sports leader award, a drama club, music instrumental tuition, choirs and a band. The school puts on a musical and dramatic performance each year. Good use is made of the school's study centre in the Lake District both for subject visits and for adventurous and team building activities. All Year 8 tutor groups visit the centre, which makes a significant contribution to their personal development. Advanced level geography students undertake field studies in Central Wales. Students have many opportunities to spend time abroad, including visits to France and Germany. Year 7 have an annual visit to Le Touquet and A level biologists undertake field studies in Spain.
- 14 Students' personal and social education is enhanced from Years 7 to 12 by a well planned programme which includes aspects of health education, sex education and education about the misuse of drugs. Careers education is also incorporated effectively in this course with appropriate support from the careers service and from local businesses. Year 10 students take part in two-weeks' work experience and Year 12 students have an opportunity of work shadowing in preparation for making choices related to employment, training or higher or further education.

- 15 Careers advice for students in the sixth form is extensive and provides a range of information and opportunities especially for those students considering higher education. Students make visits to careers conventions, open days at universities and also have a two-day, on site training about university application. This experience is combined with a three-day work shadowing activity. Those choosing not to go on to higher education receive a longer period of work shadowing and opportunity to improve interview technique. Students feel that, overall, the content of the additional programmes is appropriate and valuable to them in preparation for the next stage of their lives.
- 16 Decisions about the curriculum for students on the register of special educational needs are made after discussion with the primary school, with students and parents and using data from English, mathematics and science, following standard assessment tests at the end of Key Stage 2. The school is administering its own reading tests this year for the first time, the local education authority having provided countywide tests, in the past.
- 17 The focus on literacy in Year 7 is appropriate and the programme planned for the first few weeks has been effective. Planning is already in hand to extend the provision and to vary the balance of activities for some students. Students identified as needing support for some aspects of their learning, or because of behaviour, have individual or small group lessons or support for a proportion of their class lessons. The programmes of work for individuals address the weaknesses that have been identified in both literacy and numeracy. In Key Stage 4, students follow Certificate of Achievement modular courses, appropriate for students with special educational needs. Requirements for the regular review of statements are met.
- 18 Once the student's needs have been identified, an individual education plan is prepared by learning support teachers and provided for everyone who teaches that student. These, not in place when the school was last inspected, are useful documents, highlighting strengths and areas of need, personal targets, the action being taken and guidance for teachers focusing on small activities which will help students in lessons. Although teachers find these useful, the subject departments have not generally supplemented them with subject specific targets or actions.
- 19 There is some use of information technology by teachers in the learning support department for word processing. Some programmes designed to help reading and spelling are being used, but as yet this is not a sufficiently strong part of the curriculum.
- 20 The draft school policy for assessment has recently been agreed. It includes helpful guidance on termly assessment sheets for Key Stage 3 and on annual reports. The guidance on marking identifies key principles but leaves choice to individual departments about the particular system they use. Most departments have an assessment policy, applied reasonably consistently. Common assessment methods are used within most subjects and links are made throughout the course to the level of attainment students are reaching. However, the music and physical education assessment does not relate closely enough to the end of key stage statements and the bulk of assessment in art and music takes place towards the end of Key Stage 3. This provides insufficient help and guidance to students about their attainment and progress during the course. It is also difficult for those responsible for the guidance of students to form a reliable view of the attainment of students across the full range of subjects, or to compare a pupil's performance in one subject with that of another. Assessment of information technology is unsatisfactory overall.
- 21 At Key Stage 4, assessments have a close relationship to the grading systems used for GCSE and other courses. The assessment of coursework is well established and generally accurate both in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Continuous assessment is a critical part of the NVQ and GNVQ courses and, the contribution of people with whom students undertake work experience is included on the school's assessment arrangement.
- 22 GCSE and A-level results are analysed, as are national tests at the end of Key Stage 3. The outcomes of these analyses are increasingly effectively used in the overall curriculum planning for the following year. However, limited use is made by departments of their own assessments and of general assessment data in their internal curriculum planning and day-to-day teaching, with the result that

opportunities to adapt teaching methods and materials to match students' needs are sometimes missed.

- 23 Provision of non-National Curriculum subjects in the school is good. At Key Stage 4, the school offers an extensive and appropriate range of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) programmes in health and social care, business, leisure and tourism, art and design, construction, land and the environment. These programmes, not offered as full awards, allow students to gain additional qualifications, usually along with a GCSE, for example, in art and design. In addition to the unit accreditation programmes offered at Part One, are business, health and social care and art and design. The school has adopted a flexible approach to choosing appropriate levels, with decisions being made towards the end of the autumn term. Time allocated for the programmes is appropriate to meet the requirements of the students and the recommendation of the awarding bodies. A small number of students are following a full award, two days per week, in land and the environment at foundation level, through Walford College. The range of GNVQ programmes on offer provides breadth, which benefits the students who are less well suited to the GCSE route. In addition to the GNVQ programmes, Child Development is a GCSE option for students, currently all girls, in Years 10 and 11. National Vocational Qualifications, chosen by the students themselves, are available within the option system, usually extending beyond the end of the school day. Currently, one Year 11 pupil has successfully completed NVQ 1 in Horse Management and will achieve level 2 by the end of the school year. External training providers support the school by providing assessors to monitor progress. Sixth form vocational programmes are offered at intermediate level only. The current school curriculum plan does not provide opportunities for a vocational course at A level. However, all courses are being reviewed in light of the changes taking effect from September 2000.
- 24 Substantial improvements have been made in curriculum and assessment since the last inspection. There is now a clear and stated view by the governing body and the headteacher, much of which has already been implemented. An effective homework timetable is in place and is closely adhered to. GNVQ and NVQ have been introduced at Key Stage 4 and plans are in place to broaden the vocational provision in the sixth form to meet the needs of the full range of attainment. The structure of the timetable has been rationalised and the school now operates a longer week, comprising twenty-four hours of teaching for all but the sixth form, who have another period allocated to supported self study. This still does not meet the government suggestion of twenty-five hours for Key Stage 4 students. Provision for religious education, music and art is now adequate at Key Stage 3. The unsatisfactory relationship between physical education and the second modern foreign language remains. There is still inadequate provision for religious education in Key Stage 4 fully to meet the statutory requirements and religious education is almost absent from the sixth form provision.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

- 25 The provision that the school makes for students' personal development is good overall. However, the requirement to provide daily collective worship for all students is still not met, the position reported at the previous inspection. While some improvement has been made to the place of religious education in the curriculum, the requirements of the local agreed syllabus are still not met fully.
- 26 Provision for students' spiritual development is satisfactory. Religious education (RE) and music make a good contribution in this respect, though the full potential of RE is hampered by insufficient curriculum time. Music, for example, through the involvement of students in Christmas events in the community, contributes well. The role which other subjects play in spiritual development in day-to-day teaching is not sufficient, so that art, for example, does not make a satisfactory contribution, and English teaching lacks impact in raising awareness of values and beliefs. However, at another level, the school is doing much better than at the time of the last inspection. The use of the residential centre in the Lake District enables Year 8 students to spend time together, practising sharing and learning to live in simple conditions, within an area of outstanding natural beauty. This is rightly considered by the school to be a major part of its provision for students' personal development. Older students use these facilities for their academic studies: for example, English for poetry writing, art and music to develop their work further, thus enabling the experiences of natural beauty to be expressed through students' creativity. In the school, the requirement to provide daily collective worship has not been resolved: even the weekly assemblies in year groups do not all contain an act of collective worship. None of the tutor assemblies attended during the inspection provided collective worship.

- 27 The school makes good provision for students' moral development, though some opportunities are missed to ensure that students understand that everyone has the right to learn without disruption: in some lessons, a small minority of students slow down the pace of learning of the class due to their behaviour. Generally, however, curriculum subjects make a good contribution to students' moral development, particularly through the example of friendly and respectful relationships which teaching engenders during lessons. The school's values, widely displayed and printed in students' record books, underpin the school's ethos in this respect. The system for discipline places emphasis on respectful and co-operative behaviour, which adults in the school exemplify well. Assemblies, PSE lessons and lessons in such subjects as history, music and religious education, all contribute to moral development through consideration of moral issues or, as in music and physical education, giving students opportunities to show commitment to teamworking.
- 28 Opportunities for students' social development are more extensive than was reported at the time of the previous inspection, and provision is now good. The majority of curriculum subjects make a good contribution, particularly through students working together and learning from each other, as in modern foreign languages. PSHE lessons aim to help students to understand themselves in local, national and global contexts. Students can show initiative and exercise responsibility in the year and school councils, the latter taking a leading role in the very commendable fundraising which is such a significant feature of the school. Helping with the traditional tea party for senior citizens, assisting with Open Evenings, acting as hosts for visitors to the school and peer group mentoring are further examples of how the school is working to develop students socially. However, students are not always as courteous as they might be as they move around the school: more needs to be done to improve their social development in this respect.
- 29 Provision for students' cultural development is mainly good, though insufficient attention is given to preparing students for life in multicultural Britain through opportunities to learn about the variety and richness of cultures which they are likely to experience beyond their immediate locality. Good use is made of visits to places of interest in a number of subjects to enrich the curriculum, including extensive visits to the Continent. Visitors to the school are a regular feature. Drama and music productions encourage students to share their creative skills. Some subjects, such as art, history, music and RE, help students to understand the international sources of knowledge, but such opportunities are missed in other subjects, for example mathematics. The school is keen to develop its international links further but, in doing so, care should be taken not to overlook the need to prepare students for life in Britain itself.

Support, guidance and students' welfare

- 30 The school looks after all its students well. Students like the school and feel secure here. It makes a positive contribution to their standards and academic achievements. The parents think so, too.
- 31 The staff has good relationships with the students. The first contacts with the form tutors and the heads of years are effective. The school has good information from the primary schools and teachers ensure that students settle in quickly in their new surroundings, even when they know few students here or none at all. Students receive continuous advice from their subject teachers during the lessons on how they may improve their work or their behaviour. The use of tutor time was criticised by the previous inspection team. It still is not utilised well, but most form tutors make an effort to build a structure into it; for example in Year 7, students work on mental arithmetic in certain tutorials while the tutor sees to the students' planners or to some other of their personal needs.
- 32 The subject teachers and departments have good records from regular assessments, but modifying their teaching techniques and pace of delivery is not as well related. Students with special educational needs have good individual education plans. Most teachers are aware of them and pay appropriate attention to their contents. The marking by teachers of students' work is mostly encouraging and informative and students respond to it well, for example in the structuring of an essay. Two departments, however, do not conform to the marking system used by the rest of the school.
- 33 The school initiated a pilot project three years ago to improve its guidance system and to help the

personal development of the students further. In January, 2000, an improved version of the system will be introduced to the whole school. Designated as the 'tracking' system, it assesses regularly the students' aspirations and academic attainment and progress, and is reviewed jointly by students and teachers. The school has been developing its code of conduct over the years and it continues to do so in order to respond to, and to deal with, the behaviour problems of some of the students. The code includes a degree of tolerance to certain social skills and the school aims to improve on these. The strategies are good and ensure that the majority of students are not restricted from expressing themselves or diverted from their work. The school introduced the supervision room where students may be sent to cool down under the supervision of a duty teacher. They are expected to reflect on their misdemeanour and return to the class at the end of the hour. There are clear boundaries and the students know them. Harassment or bullying is not tolerated in any form. The school aims for a minimum of, and a further reduction in, exclusions but will use this sanction when necessary. This multi-layered strategy is proving to be successful in reducing exclusions.

- 34 The monitoring and promoting of students' attendance is managed very well. In the first instance, the form tutor deals with the occasional absentee. If concern emerges, the head of year is involved to find a solution with the pupil. The regular weekly meeting with the education welfare officer reinforces or modifies the approach with the more recalcitrant non-attende. The school has also widened its curriculum successfully to make it more interesting for a number of older students and it employs the mentoring skills of individuals from the community to motivate students to better attendance.
- 35 The school has a well-established system of vigilance for child protection. The Area Child Protection Committee guidelines are implemented. In the recent past, all teachers had an opportunity to refresh their knowledge of recognising abuse and their responsibility if they see any. The school nurse not only administers to minor injuries but is also alert to signs of abuse, physical or mental.
- 36 Part of the curriculum is personal and social education (PSE). Specialist teachers teach the well-structured programme. It alerts the students from entry to the school to the need to prepare for life after school through the thread of careers education. This programme also covers empathy with the disabled, for example in Year 9, students experience for a short period what it may be like for the blind when they walk a well defined route by walking it themselves, blindfolded and guided by a fellow pupil. Sex and drugs education also forms part of the core of the programme. External speakers and sessions in cross-curricular teaching effectively support these messages, for example in science, art, and religious education. The Youth Service facilitated the debate about smoking, involving a group of students from Years 7, 8 and 9 as part of the Peer Education Project. They put 'smoking in the dock' in the town's Magistrates Court where they questioned expert witnesses and presented the responses from peers to the questionnaire prepared by the group.
- 37 The school and its governing body take their health and safety duties seriously. In most respects they conform to statutory requirements, for example in the testing of portable electrical equipment and fire drill. Nonetheless, a number of examples of non-compliance were identified during the inspection. These received immediate attention.

Partnership with parents and the community

- 38 The school's partnership with the community is excellent. Links have been maintained and strengthened since the last inspection. The school has good channels of communication with parents and provides good quality information for them. Most parents are more than satisfied with it and a few think they are getting too much information. The annual report on students' attainment and progress is detailed and comprehensive and it gives a full picture to parents of their children's achievements. It includes comments on the attitude of the student and targets for improvements jointly agreed between the student and the form tutor. The parents think the tutors and staff are very approachable, and the inspectors concur with this view.
- 39 The school prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents contain the legally required information and much more. The Grove School newsletter issued at least once a term provides snapshots about school life, for example how Year 7 students feel about their new school described in their own words; the sporting events and success; comments sent to the local press about a play

performed in the school hall. The notices sent to parents range from visits locally to that planned in France. As soon as the national examination results became available, the school informed parents, explaining them, in context of the overall scene.

- 40 The support the Friends of Grove School (FOGS) is held in high esteem by the school and the parents. They help the school in many ways, from assisting in the formulation of policies to organising fund raising. The bonfire organised by the FOGS in the grounds of the school is the major event in the town on Guy Fawkes Night. The parents' group contributes to the upkeep of The Birks, the school's outdoor centre in the Lake District, much loved by students for weekend trips or as base for a full week of field study. FOGS made a substantial grant to purchase a computer system for the pupils' use.
- 41 The involvement of the parents in their children's learning is satisfactory. It is mostly passive support: they attend open evenings and events organised by the school and FOGS, they also show their commitment financially by supporting the educational visit programme, but they rarely do more. The school's latest initiative to involve parents more is notifying parents of Year 11 students if their child academically is at risk of underachieving. Some parents participate in a briefing session on how they may help their child to achieve the higher grades. The parents who take advantage of the opportunity feel it is very helpful. Annual reports to parents are full and informative. They provide a detailed assessment of students' personal development, their working patterns and their attainment in various aspects of all subjects. They also indicate their general attainment in relation to the year as a whole and their marks in tests and examinations compared with the average for the class. Students are involved in target setting and the comments they make are incorporated into their reports.
- 42 The school's partnership with the community is excellent. No doubt more can be done, but what is done is first class. The school has just gained the 'Schools Curriculum Award 2000' awarded for 'distinctive and valuable contribution to the community'. It has maintained its successful links with industry and widened them with other sections of the community. Students in Year 12 run a business of their own through the Young Enterprise scheme. Tutors from industry and commerce guide them. The school hosted the 'Taste of the Town' initiative of the local food industry.
- 43 Through its links with industry, the school finds work experience places for all of its Year 10 students for two weeks and for Year 12 for work shadowing for a week. The school involves all their teachers in visiting students at work and assessing their performance. Sponsorships from local enterprises and from county and national grants enable the school to provide the opportunity for every student to participate in all the school's educational visits if they so wish.
- 44 The school's embracing of the excellent services of a youth worker/facilitator means that many students have a mentor from the community. The mentors come from all sections of the community and they are carefully matched to the students' needs. The mentoring may be of short or long duration depending on the partners. The 'Dialogue 2000' initiative enables students from Year 12 to attend a school and have work experience in France for seven weeks. As a result, the interest in modern foreign languages has increased substantially. The additional curriculum, the 'Third Session' is also open to the public, enabling students and adults to learn together. The adult education service also uses the school's facilities. Visiting artists to the school and to The Birks enrich the students' education further.
- 45 The school has many high quality links with educational and other institutions. It ranges from joint staff development with primary schools to the school librarian demonstrating to student teachers from Keele University the most practical way for students to find material for research in the library. The school has an arrangement for educating a few of its students at a local college some of the time in order to enhance their achievements and a pride in themselves. It also has a compact with Wolverhampton University to provide high quality further education for some of its students who traditionally would not have considered this option.
- 46 Many of the town's societies use the school's facilities for their activities. The Choral Society, trained and conducted by the school's head of music, performs its concerts in the school hall. The army and airforce cadets have their base here. The county council holds some conferences at the school. The

school is popular with sports and dancing clubs. The school invites the public to its plays and organises a Carol service at St. Mary's church. The students organise many successful events to raise and donate funds to local, national and international charities.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

- 47 The Grove School is very well led. It benefits from very good teamwork amongst the senior staff and governors and a clear sense of direction in which the philosophy and approach of the headteacher is central. He creates an ethos of raised academic expectations and innovation which is motivating staff and students alike. After a slow start following the last inspection in which some of the policy issues raised were addressed, but the planning to underpin them was delayed, the arrival of an already experienced headteacher accelerated all aspects of the response. The school now has carefully identified priorities, in which its community has every opportunity to become involved, is open to change and the suggestions of all those involved in the success of the school. Changes already made are secure and the prospects for future improvements are good. As a result of the generally good systems, co-operation between governors, staff and parents, and a range of recent effective initiatives from senior management, the school is in a good position to sustain this pace of change and to maintain its good ethos.
- 48 The headteacher leads by example, whether within his own teaching or within his responsibilities to students, teachers, parents, governors and the town. He has high expectations of the professional standards of his colleagues and the behaviour and application required of students. He is thoughtful, well prepared and very well respected by parents, a significant number of whom went out their way to inform the inspectors of this. His senior team supports him well.
- 49 Headteacher, senior staff and governors work very well together. They have a clear shared philosophy and vision for the school, expressed in clear aims and values. This was published in March 1999, following lengthy consultation with all interested parties. The school development plan highlights short, medium and longer-term objectives and the need to raise attainment. It does not adequately address the two areas of policy and practice remaining unsatisfactory: the co-ordination and provision for information technology and religious education, and the statutory breach in not providing an act of collective worship on a daily basis.
- 50 Governors' links with the school are very strong, both on a routine and a planning basis. The device of using focus groups, as policy making and planning groups, has been eminently successful. This enables governors to have real 'hands-on' experience of the school's strengths and weaknesses and to work directly with staff, students and parents at finding solutions. As an example, major changes in the style, accommodation and curriculum of the sixth form have been put in place in the last two years to put the sixth form on a far better basis for the future. Another example relates to the preparations for the curriculum changes for September 2000, in which consultations, almost complete, are resulting in good plans with wide acceptance. The governing body is very well led and organises its work very efficiently, with a strong sense of collegiality and purpose. Chairs of committees are very well informed and, like the chairman, give the school a lot of time and effort.
- 51 The governors review the policy for special educational needs and the vice-chair of governors has taken on the responsibility for overseeing the work of the learning support department. She has become familiar with this work through close liaison with the head of learning support and understanding of the needs of the school. The learning support department is well led and, although in post for a comparatively short time, the special educational needs co-ordinator has a good understanding of the role. The linked governor, who represents the interests of students with special educational needs, supports her and keeps the governing body informed. Through regular meetings with members of subject departments and through the information she gives teachers about each pupil on the register, the co-ordinator ensures that all students are known. Reviews of progress are carried out regularly with information gathered from all teachers. Although a department, not all its staff members are working exclusively in learning support and some are part-time. Nevertheless a shared understanding of standards and expectations has been established. The need for subject departments to develop their strategies for teaching students with a wide range of attainment is recognised by senior managers.
- 52 There is an appropriate range of policies, including in relation to equality of opportunity and access,

to support the work of the school. Many have recently been reviewed and updated in line with changes in the school's curriculum, and in the light of curriculum innovations now well established. The school still fails to meet statutory requirements in relation to collective worship, as it did at the time of the last inspection. However, the key issues highlighted in the last inspection report have otherwise all been well addressed.

- 53 Most departments are well organised and have in place good systems to support learning and enable gradual curriculum change. Monitoring and evaluation is not yet satisfactory. There was no systematic approach to monitoring until two years ago and there has been considerable progress with the development of a successful line management arrangement, which is both supportive and evaluative. The uneven response of heads of subject, however, to their monitoring responsibilities remains a strategic planning weakness. Few have incorporated into their roles the responsibility to monitor the quality of their colleagues' teaching, planning and assessment of students' work. Most have as yet had little experience of management training and many have high contact ratios that mean that they are not well placed to undertake this responsibility.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

- 54 The teaching staff has good qualifications in all subject areas, except in IT across the curriculum, where qualifications and experience are only satisfactory. They have extensive teaching experience; only five of the full time teachers have been in the profession for less than five years. They know the school and the area well. Staffing has been stable: nearly three out of four teachers have taught at the school for more than five years. The effect of this on standards is good overall.
- 55 Although the pupil to teacher ratio is similar to most comprehensive schools, the teachers have significantly higher teaching loads than most others do and this has an impact on the pace of planning for change. The school does not comply with the current appraisal requirements but it has its own regular professional review of personal development of each teacher every year. The senior management team members monitor teaching and identify good practices and weakness. The budget for in-service training is not generous but priorities are allocated based on the need of the individual and its relation to the school development plan. The provision is satisfactory except in ICT. The lack of evaluation of the effectiveness of the training noted at the last inspection has been rectified. It is a key feature of the 'Investors In People' programme to which the school aspires.
- 56 The school recognises that the newly qualified teacher engaged on a supply teaching contract very recently should have an induction and support programme and plans to address this urgently.
- 57 The support staff, including learning support assistants, make a positive contribution to the smooth and efficient running of the school. They are also included in the yearly review system. The bursar, nurse, caretaker, library assistants, office and administrative staff give valuable services to the school. The work done by the supervisors, the catering and cleaning staff is much appreciated by staff, parents and students.
- 58 The technicians are well qualified and experienced and the teachers appreciate their endeavours. Their numbers are similar to other schools but their deployment is uneven. The effects of their efforts are evident in science; deployment is satisfactory in the library and design and technology but unsatisfactory in other areas. Some parts of the school, which would greatly benefit from support, have none.
- 59 The school presents a pleasant first impression, with its attractive Grove College building by the main entrance. This provides good accommodation for sixth form students. The school dedicates an exhibition room in the college for the work of the students and local artists. The playing fields and grounds are well kept and are an asset to the school. The fabric of the main buildings, however, is less good. The condition of the roofs causes continuous concern. The external decoration is in poor state and wood panels and frames are rotting in some places. Internally the decoration is acceptable. There is little room for display of students' work in these buildings. The narrow staircases, the winding and confined corridors cause congestion at breaks when students move to their classes. These restrict the ability of staff to supervise the students effectively at certain times.

60 Most of the accommodation for teaching is satisfactory or better. Storage areas for art, IT and music are unsatisfactory. The lack of storage facilities for art was remarked upon at the last inspection. The school makes good use of its facilities at The Birks. The winter months apart, it is in use for fieldwork, for groups with residential artists and for the Year 8 residential weeks.

61 The quality and quantity of teaching and learning resources are satisfactory overall. They are good in mathematics, science, music and business education but unsatisfactory in IT. In some subjects, for example in geography, there is a shortage of textbooks. The library has a good range of good quality books and adequate number of computers. It will have Internet connection within the next few weeks. Although it is used well, it has not yet developed into a complete resource centre offering an all-embracing source of information.

98 **The efficiency of the school**

62 The school has an income and expenditure slightly below average, when compared with schools in similar education authorities. The budget is well used and administration of all matters financial is very good indeed. Priorities are established following the lead given by school development planning and by the curriculum.

63 Governors exercise discreet but thorough oversight and participate actively in setting priorities, which are then adhered to. Governors have acquired a considerable level of expertise in working with budget managers to get the best value they can for the school. There are efficient systems for ensuring that they remain well informed about the short, medium and long-term planning and effectiveness of the school. The bursar, who generates clear and reliable financial analyses and projections for them, supports them very well in their work. The headteacher operates very good systems to ensure that financial probity is assured and procedures are secure and individual budget holders can track their expenditure with ease.

64 At departmental level, where better accountability has been in place for the last two years, spending is careful. In most departments, good value for money is achieved after careful consideration of the options within a constrained level of capitation. Staff, teaching and non-teaching, are well deployed within the constraints of the budget, but some departments suffer from the lack of non-teaching support, and their efficiency is lessened.

65 The standards fund is well spent to obtain relevant and supportive training. Funding for students with special educational needs is efficiently deployed.

66 The use of available time and expertise for the support of students with special educational needs was an issue in the last inspection. Although still an issue, the requirements of statementing which allocates hours of support to individual students, limits the way that support can be allocated to classes with a number of students on the special educational needs register. English, mathematics and science are rightly a priority but the needs of some classes are also at time significant. Year 7 groups have a generous allocation of staff, which may be more essential at some times than others. Whilst there will always be too little support to give as much as teachers would like, there is room for careful monitoring of the placing of support and for the way in which students are grouped, so that the best use can be made of learning support teachers and assistants.

67 This expert and careful budget management has contributed towards the improvements in the school, in which:

- there are generally sufficient well-qualified and experienced teaching and non-teaching staff and they are well deployed;
- staffing costs are tightly controlled;
- there are adequate resources of books and equipment in most, though not all, subjects;
- pupil outcomes, as measured by examination successes, are average although on intake, attainment is somewhat below average;
- students make at least satisfactory and generally good progress;

- students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress;
- standards are rising in most aspects of the life of the school and there are improved numbers of students staying in education after the age of 16 and 18;
- teaching is at least satisfactory in 99% of lessons seen in this inspection;
- there is very good oversight of planned expenditure.

- 1 However, the school does not yet have a detailed long-term plan for equipment replacement or for the up-dating and networking of school computers to enable departments to take full advantage of the opportunities computers offer to raise standards and engage students in learning by non-traditional means. Overall, there is a serious deficiency in provision of hardware and software to support the curriculum; the school is currently developing its long-term plans to deal with this.
- 2 The overall judgement about the school's efficiency is that the school provides good value for money. This is an improvement on the findings of the last inspection and reflects the fact that the school's improvements are secure and it is well placed to continue this accelerated pace of change.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

- 3 Students enter the school with levels of prior attainment in English which are slightly below the national average. At the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests, the percentage of students attaining level 5 or above is close to the national average, and in line with schools with similar intakes. In GCSE English examinations at the end of Key Stage 4, results in two of the last three years have been below national averages but the most recent results show a significant improvement and are close to the national average for similar schools. GCSE results in English Literature in two of the last three years have been slightly below the national average. In both English Language and English Literature, girls outperform boys by a greater degree than nationally. GCSE results in drama are well above the national average. Results in A level English Language and Literature are in line with expectations for these courses. Modest results in theatre studies reflect difficulties in transition to an academic course from a performance based GCSE.
- 4 Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 3 is close to national expectations for students at this stage. Where students' work matches national expectations, in two thirds of lessons, speaking and reading is quite fluent. Students acquire a sound grasp of basic subject-related language such as metaphor and simile and command a fair range of general vocabulary, as in a Year 7 class seeking alternatives to 'nice', who came up with 'succulent', 'blissful' and 'vibrantly colourful'. However, spelling in all classes is comparatively weak. In those classes where attainment is lower, there is a significant difference between the neat and extended writing of girls and the shorter untidy pieces of boys. In these classes, reading is often halting and expressionless. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment matched national expectations in roughly half of lessons, mainly top sets, and here listening and speaking skills are well developed. In a Year 11 top set, composed largely of girls, students made confident and imaginative presentations to the class of a poem from the set anthology. In a Year 11 second set, students took on a teaching role, leading the rest of the class profitably through revision of the techniques and vocabulary for the discussion of poetry. Written assignments on set books are well organised and presented, show good knowledge of the text and the ability to discuss language. In those classes, a similar number, where attainment fell below expectations, students showed little confidence in speaking, lacking the vocabulary to express finer shades of meaning. Writing in folders was of inconsistent quality, in many cases showing uncertainty in the basic skills of paragraphing, punctuation and spelling. In a Year 10 middle ability group working on the set play, written work showed that they understood the text but limitations in the skills of extended writing confined their achievement to low grades. In such groups, boys are particularly reluctant writers and show little commitment to continuing work at home. 'A' level students in both Language and Literature show a full range of attainment in their writing, including some top grade work, as in a Year 13 student's essay on George Orwell which showed an impressive grasp of his political ideas. Most students in sixth form groups can engage in mature discussion of serious topics, as when a Year 12 group was considering the nature of love as depicted in Keats' 'Lamia'.
- 5 Progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory for students of all ability, including students with SEN and in the sixth form it is good. Progress is generally better in the higher sets where the preponderance of girls encourages a collective commitment to learning. It is also better in those classes where students are taught to take responsibility for their own learning. The lack of easy access to computer facilities militates against improvement in presentation and accuracy in lower attaining students. Students at all levels benefit from carefully considered feedback given through the detailed marking of their work.
- 6 Students' attitudes and behaviour at all key stages are satisfactory and, in motivated classes, are good. Most students look forward to their English lessons and have positive relationships with their teachers and each other. They willingly volunteer to read or act. However, in some middle and lower ability groups where there is a predominance of boys, students need constant checking to keep on task

and in a few classes show a lack of self discipline which offers a challenge to the patience and authority of the teacher. As GCSE approaches, many students, particularly in higher sets, develop a real sense of educational partnership with their teacher. Relationships in drama are good at all levels of ability.

- 7 All the teaching observed in English and drama was at least satisfactory with about half good or very good. Successful teaching is characterised by: the commitment shown in thorough preparation and planning; the delivery of well structured lessons which allow for a variety of approaches to learning; the adoption of techniques of question and answer which allow time for reflection, tease answers out of students and refine responses; clearly communicated learning objectives which emphasise the relevance and importance of the subject; organisation of lessons so that students are required to think for themselves and take responsibility. Where teaching is less successful, although still satisfactory, there is a lack of sharpness; a sense of personal responsibility by 'giving' too much and reduced expectations of students in terms of their own commitment; a lack of insistence on classroom routines to maintain an atmosphere in which all students can learn.
- 8 The curriculum meets statutory requirement and offers equal access to all students. In drama, students can opt for the subject either within the normal option time or by opting for a third session after school. Assessment policies are clear and well-observed and carefully considered comments on work play a part in the developing process of target setting. Students generally have a good idea of their level of attainment. Self-assessment is particularly well-developed in drama and plays a key role in the achievement of high standards.
- 9 English and drama make a considerable contribution to the social and cultural life of the school through the range of opportunities offered. Students benefit from regular theatre visits, meeting visiting writers in school, and attendance at subject conferences. A teenage reading group allows mutual discussion of books and the Lake District Centre lends itself to opportunities for creative writing in a Wordsworthian setting. A sixth form literary tour of Dublin allowed scope for 'A' level students to study the language of taped museum guides. The Drama department offers generous opportunities for pupil involvement through the two Youth Theatres. The recent production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' gave many students successful experience of public performance.
- 10 The English department is staffed by experienced, well-qualified teachers who have had to take on additional responsibility owing to the long-term absence of the Head of Department. The acting Head of Department has successfully taken the department forward through a time of change and his leadership has contributed to a clear focus on raising attainment. There is a strong team spirit, which has been instrumental in overcoming temporary staffing problems. In English lessons, students have access to good quality books and printed materials. Classrooms offer an attractive environment for learning with their high quality display of students' work. The drama room is adequate but does not reflect the contribution this department makes to students' personal development. A major deficiency is the lack of easy access to computer facilities. However, the department is well served by an excellent library.
- 11 The department has made significant progress since the last inspection. National Curriculum requirements are now consistently implemented, assessment policies have been reviewed. The low achievement of boys is being addressed through the acquisition of appropriate texts and the use of structured tasks designed to assist in the skills of extended writing. The most recent GCSE results indicate a significant improvement in the attainment of boys as well as girls. However, the lower attainment of boys at both key stages remains a major issue. The impact on boys' attainment of the gender imbalance in some groups needs to be monitored and the balance of advantage of different setting arrangements needs to be kept under review. Ways have not yet been found for mutual observation of teaching styles which successfully encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning .

Mathematics

- 12 Students' attainment on entry to the school, measured by Key Stage 2 standard assessment tests (SATs) and other tests carried out by the school, is slightly below the nationally expected levels for

1999. Entry attainment levels in previous years have been similar. By the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment in mathematics closely matches the national averages. In the National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 3 in 1999 the proportion of students gaining level 6 and above, was slightly above the national average, and similar to that achieved by students in similar schools. There was no difference in the attainment levels achieved by boys and by girls at both these levels. These most recent tests indicate an improving trend and, when considering the past three years, the proportion of students gaining level 5 or above has steadily risen, mirroring the trend nationally.

- 13 The high attaining students observed during the inspection are achieving standards that are at or above the expected level by the end of the key stage. This is particularly true for some students in Year 9 and those high attaining students in both Years 7 and 8. In Year 8, the proportion of students considered to be high attaining is less than those identified in the other two years. The attainment levels these high attaining students reach in the various aspects of mathematics are very similar. Other students in the key stage are attaining appropriate levels. The standard of attainment by the end of the Key Stage 3 is improving and is slightly better than that achieved nationally.
- 14 GCSE results in the grades of A* to C, in 1999, reached the national average. Five students in 1999 gained the top grade of A*, an improvement on the 1998 position. Girls continue to gain a larger proportion of the higher grades, although the boys made significant improvement from their achievement in 1998. The percentages were in line with those achieved by similar schools. The school exceeded the national percentage figure achieved for A*-G grades in 1999. The 1999 results were a further improvement on the percentage figures gained in 1998, and over the last three years the school's results are similar to those achieved nationally.
- 15 High attaining students observed during the inspection are achieving standards that match the higher grades of the GCSE. These students are attaining similar standards in the various aspects of mathematics as demonstrated by their high standard of GCSE coursework. Students in the higher attaining sets of Year 10 are not fulfilling their expectation as predicted from their Key Stage 3 test scores. The most able in these sets require greater challenge from their work. In contrast, those students in the low attaining sets are challenged and motivated by their work in the graduated assessment scheme. Students with special educational needs generally achieve standards which are in line with their prior attainment. The standards of attainment achieved by students in Key Stage 4 overall are level with the national expectation.
- 16 The A and B grades achieved by students in 1999, following GCE A level courses in mathematics and further mathematics, continues to match the national averages. The school has achieved consistently high success rate of 100 per cent with grades A to E for the past three years. It is particularly noteworthy to record that the proportion of girls following a GCE A level course in mathematics is rising year on year.
- 17 The progress of students in Key Stage 3 is never less than satisfactory, and in three-quarters of the lessons it is good. In a small proportion of lessons, progress is very good. Where progress is good, teachers set work that is matched to students' previous attainment levels, enabling them to consolidate their knowledge and make progress with the topics. Students in the higher attaining groups of Year 9 are making very good progress with their work on finding the area of shapes.
- 18 The progress boys and girls make, and those with special educational needs, across this key stage is similar. The additional support, when available in lessons these students receive, has a positive impact on the progress and standards of mathematical achievement made. In the majority of lessons at Key Stage 4 students make good or better progress although on two occasions, their progress was unsatisfactory. Lessons in Year 11 classes are well structured and teachers usually have high expectation for those students seeking to gain the higher GCSE grades. Students in the high attaining sets make particular good progress and across all the attainment targets. In one such group, really good progress is being made with their understanding of circle properties and they apply the laws effectively in a range of challenging questions. Another Year 11 group use laws of probability to examine the likelihood of an event happening. These students are effectively challenged by the work, understand the use of tree diagrams and have a good grasp of working with fractions and decimals to calculate the probabilities. A similar group of students consolidate their understanding of algebra

through careful practice of the rules for expanding expressions involving brackets.

- 19 The progress made by students across Year 10 is variable. The more able in one high attaining group are not sufficiently stretched with the work on probability tree diagrams. Lesson expectation and challenge was too low. In another Year 10 high attaining group the progress is better with their work on possibility spaces. Low attaining students in one group make limited progress with interpreting timetables. These students are distracted by a minority of students who find it difficult to concentrate and sustain interest for any length of time. Such students in this key stage barely make satisfactory progress. In contrast, other students working towards the graduated assessment scheme staged tests are making good progress with work on area of shapes, displaying data in chart form. Students with special educational needs in Key Stage 4 make good progress overall, and in particular, with developing their skills in working with number as suitable preparation for the requirements of foundation level GCSE.
- 20 The progress of students in the sixth form is never less than good and in most cases it is very good. These students are making substantial gains in their knowledge, for example, with work with algebraic equations and the trigonometrical relationships found in a circle. Other students in Year 12 consolidate their knowledge of statistics when considering the probability of answering correctly short or long questions in an exam.
- 21 The behaviour of students in lessons is almost always good throughout the school. Relationships are friendly and supportive. Students work collaboratively, demonstrating a sense of responsibility and growing maturity. In Key Stage 3, students' attitude to their learning is enthusiastic in many lessons. In Key Stage 4, attitudes of the majority of students are particularly positive where there is the motivation of examinations. Across both key stages there are a minority of students whose behaviour impacts on their progress, and sometimes on that of the group.
- 22 In all lessons at Key Stage 3, teaching is never less than satisfactory, with the vast majority being good. In a small proportion of these, the teaching is very good. At Key Stage 4, teaching in virtually all lessons is never less than satisfactory. The greater proportion of these lessons is good but none are very good. In the sixth form, in all the lessons seen, the teaching is good or very good.
- 23 Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject is strong, and their use of suitable examples is very clear. The teaching is effective and ensures that all students experience the same well planned lessons. Where teaching is very good, planning is detailed and teaching methods are more varied and the timing and pace of lessons is well judged. In these lessons, the expectation of students is high, the work is challenging and good progress is made. Resources are used effectively to support learning in all lessons. The combination of teacher instruction with exercises to give students practice results in good teaching. In lessons, teachers do not all monitor effectively enough the progress students make, the amount of work that every student completes and students' gains in understanding each lesson.
- 24 Teachers' planning and intentions for most lessons are carefully considered but are not always shared with the students. Insufficient attention is sometimes paid to the needs of different abilities within each teaching group when preparing work and activities. Homework reinforces and extends work undertaken in class. Work is marked and the more thorough marking includes comments of a very helpful kind, written to aid students' development and progress. In most lessons, students receive advice on their progress and where they can make further improvement. Teachers' readily praise students' work and use the reward systems that operate in the school to good effect.
- 25 An enthusiastic and hard working, dedicated team of well-qualified teachers teaches the subject. They provide very good role models and have a clear commitment for the well being of students. Teachers continue to seek to improve their own performance and through a regular sharing of good practice, further benefits are accruing towards raising the standards in mathematics. The department is very effectively organised and has strong leadership. Documentation is extensive and the scheme of work is comprehensive, providing sound guidelines to the teaching of the subject. The absence of opportunities for students to develop their information technology skills on a regular basis needs addressing urgently.

- 26 Since the last inspection, progress has been made with the issues raised, although the position regarding information technology remains the same. Recently rewritten schemes of work, supporting documentation and a focus on assessment and target setting for students, are an indication of the considerable capacity the department has for tackling the demanding agenda it has set itself to raise standards further.

Science

- 27 At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, students' attainment was close to that expected nationally. However, in relation to similar schools, these results were below the national expectation. Results were as predicted from the attainment of students on entry to the school. Over the last three years, the attainment of students in science has been close to the national averages, with girls performing slightly better than boys. Attainment in lessons reflects this trend, with attainment in line or above national expectations. Higher attaining Year 9 students, for example, are not only able to describe the particle arrangements and energy changes as liquids change to solids and but can also identify the areas on a cooling curve graph where this occurs. Where students demonstrated average attainment, they were able to plan and carry out simple investigations, making the test fair and varying one factor. They could describe the place of the planets in the solar system and relate this to their relative temperatures and orbit length.
- 28 The overall attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 4 in double award science was well below the national average, with the proportion of students attaining A* to C grades in 1999 well below that found nationally, while the proportion attaining A* to G grades was only slightly below. Until this year there was a downward trend in attainment, but in 1999 results improved, with boys attaining slightly higher grades than girls. The results in science at GCSE have been below other subjects in the school for the last two years. Attainment in lessons is slightly better than the GCSE results reflect and in three out of four lessons observed, attainment was in line with or better than that expected nationally at the end of the key stage. This difference in attainment is, in part, the result of students being reliant on their teachers in the lessons and not developing sufficiently the skills and confidence to think independently. Above average attainment was shown where Year 11 students, both boys and girls, investigating how the heat loss or gain by warm-blooded animals is affected by their body covering. They could plan and carry out the investigation and make predictions based on their scientific knowledge of insulation and radiation, and were able to evaluate their chosen method and suggest improvements.
- 29 The numbers of students taking any of the science subjects offered at A level fluctuates each year and between subjects, making comparisons difficult. However, over the last few years the proportion of the entry achieving pass grades has been broadly in line with national averages in physics and environmental science, but below in chemistry and biology. Within lessons, attainment is always in line with course expectations or better. In physics, for example, students can set up a complex circuit to charge and discharge a capacitor observing changes on an oscilloscope, evaluating their procedure at each point. In chemistry they are able to construct a diagram of a complex polymer and, in biology, can identify the reasons for including certain constituents in a growth medium used to culture cells.
- 30 The progress students make in science is always at least satisfactory, with a few examples at both key stages where the overall progress within lessons was good or very good. The best progress seen was in the sixth form and in Key Stage 4, where in one in four lessons progress was good or very good. The best progress was shown when students were given the opportunity to reflect and build on previous knowledge and understanding of a topic, see it in the context of everyday examples and apply it to new situations. This was evident when learning about air resistance in the context of friction and free-fall parachutists or developing the skills of scientific enquiry over a period of time. Higher attaining students make the fastest progress when fully engaged on task and when the teachers set high expectations in terms of completion of work in hand. Where progress of all students is not so marked, the application to task and concentration is not consistent. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress within practical lessons and when tasks and resources are specifically matched to their individual needs. The data collected by the faculty through both key stages is used to track students' progress, predict grades and identify those for whom additional support is required.

- 31 In nine out of ten lessons, the response of students is satisfactory or better, with some unsatisfactory response in both key stages but none in the sixth form. All students apply themselves initially to the tasks set, but occasionally concentration was not sustained, particularly if time limits were not set. Behaviour in the main was satisfactory, but there were a few incidences at both key stages where a small group of students dominated or disrupted the class. However, when engaged in practical activities, all students work well together and without exception observed the safety procedures reinforced by the teacher. The standard of written work varies at both key stages, with examples of very neatly presented work from both boys and girls. However, there were many examples in all years of untidily presented work, often incomplete and in the main with poorly presented diagrams.
- 32 In all the lessons seen, the standard of teaching was at least satisfactory and in about a third of these, the teaching was good or better. There were examples of very good teaching at all key stages, but it was not always shared across the group of teachers. Overall, the best teaching seen was in the sixth form where half the lessons were good or very good. At Key Stage 4 one in four lessons seen was better than satisfactory and at Key Stage 3 it was one in eight. The best teaching was characterised by a brisk pace and high expectation set of students in terms of application and completion of work. The teacher uses techniques which allow all students to demonstrate their understanding rather than just a few, such as when Year 7 students discussed the suitability of different materials for a particular purposes: wood for saucepan and concrete for shoes. The lesson is planned well and the tasks set challenge all students. Praise and encouragement is used throughout the lesson and homework tasks set extend the work covered and are marked thoroughly with constructive comments and suggestions for improvement. Less effective teaching had a more leisurely pace, where the outcomes of the lesson are not so focussed, and where lower attaining students or those with special educational needs did not achieve their full potential.
- 33 Under the guidance of the experienced head of department, the issues raised in the last report have, in the main, been addressed. The department now has developed links with local industries and put in place the entitlement to information technology, including datalogging, with the limited hardware available. In order to capitalise on the progress already made, the use of a wider range of teaching styles should be encouraged by sharing the good practice seen and applying the faculty homework policy more rigorously. Greater emphasis should be given to prescribing standards of written presentation, and improving the opportunities for students to develop their speaking and listening skills.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

- 34 By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national expectations for the majority of students. Students develop their skills across a broad range of art activities that include painting, sculpture, printmaking and ceramics. Students can use a sketchbook to record ideas and information and they study art from a range of cultures and can relate their own work to these. Year 9 have developed paintings from studies of Japanese imagery and a lively collection of painting work based upon Aboriginal art was on display in the main school building. The development of painting skills is particularly good, as is the ability to work in ceramics and sculpture. For example, students in a Year 9 group were making vessels to a high standard based upon sensitive studies of natural forms. Students do not develop skills in the application and use of IT to develop their art.
- 35 At the end of Key Stage 4, the 1998 GCSE results overall for A* to C grades were below the national average. However the results for girls have improved steadily over the past three years and are very much better than boys. The boys' results have continued to decline significantly below the national average. In the 1999 GCSE examination, girls' results were good with 79 per cent achieving grades at a level C or above. In lessons at Key Stage 4 and in the folders of current coursework there are clear signs that standards are continuing to improve. Students can work confidently with a range of media and scale with particularly imaginative painting and bold work in two and three dimensions. The majority of students are at the national average standard and a significant number show attainment in drawing that is above the national average, for example high quality pencil studies of plants by one group of Year 11 students. Construction skills are well developed, for example students, studying part one GNVQ created a lively range of ceramics work based upon their studies of architecture. Knowledge and understanding of a range of artistic styles is appropriately developed in most cases but use of information technology for research and to develop their work is weak.
- 36 In the sixth form, GCE A level results for grades A and B are above the national average and the 100 per cent pass rate for grades A to E has been sustained over the last three years. Results for the small number of entries in 1999 were above the national average. There has been a steady improvement in the percentage of students gaining the higher grades over the past three years and an increase in take up for the subject in the current sixth form. Attainment in the present Year 13 is above average for a significant number of students. A particular strength is the development of imaginative and expressive personal responses to a variety of subject matter and materials in both two and three dimensions.
- 37 Across all key stages students make at least satisfactory and often good progress. Students develop their observation skills and imagination through increasingly complex and demanding tasks. In Key Stage 3, the best progress is with skills to handle work in three dimensions and this is because staff have good specialist skills and provide challenging activities which progressively develop students confidence in handling a range of materials. Lower attaining students benefit particularly from the good quality verbal support which helps them progress.
- 38 In Key Stage 4, students make good progress, building upon their skills from Key Stage 3 and with their ability to develop personal and expressive responses to a variety of subject matter. Within the GNVQ groups the structured nature of the work helps students, particularly the lower attainers, to make satisfactory progress. In the sixth form, students make good progress consolidating their skills gained at GCSE and develop greater independence and responsibility for their own work.
- 39 At all key stages, the great majority of students demonstrate very positive attitudes to their art work. Concentration levels are often good and this is because the work is challenging. The great majority of students show respect for staff and for their environment and work hard to produce their best. Very good attitudes are evident amongst students who attend after school art sessions and this results in a high standard of work. Students co-operate with each other and develop positive relationships with one another and with staff. As they progress through the key stages many demonstrate mature and responsible attitudes to their work. Attitudes in the sixth form are also good, with students developing appropriate levels of independence.

- 40 Teaching is good in the majority of lessons, with the great strength being the specialist knowledge and skills of teachers, particularly in three-dimensional work. Although conditions are sometimes cramped, teachers encourage students to tackle an exciting range of three-dimensional work. Teachers manage students well and plan lessons that provide an appropriate range of opportunities that are challenging. In the best lessons, aims are made clear through discussion and demonstration, with effective use made of specialist language and visual resources. For example, in a Year 9 lesson using clay, good quality examples of pottery were used to illustrate what was meant by surface decoration. Students are encouraged to learn about and respond to a range of art, both new and old, and to reflect upon their own work and the work of others. Teaching in the sixth form is good and encourages imaginative coursework and greater independence. Verbal comment is well used in most lessons to give guidance to students but the use of written comment and assessment, for example in sketchbooks, is more limited. In Key Stage 3, the newly introduced assessment procedures, together with pupil assessment sheets, offer the potential to track progress more effectively and could have greater impact if used during units of work to give encouragement and clear targets for improvement as work progresses.
- 41 With the exception of opportunities to use information technology to develop their artwork, students enjoy a well structured curriculum that is enriched by the use of the local community as a resource, the field study centre, visits to galleries and work with artists in residence. For example GNVQ students extended their knowledge of commercial silk screen printing through a talk given by a local printer. The development of an exhibition area in the sixth form block is a valuable asset for the promotion of art as part of the wider school curriculum.
- 42 The department is effectively led, with a vision of what art can provide that is shared by all in the department. Staff work hard as a team with very little technician support and make the most of the one hour practical lessons. Development planning has identified some targets for improvement on which the department is making progress, with the development of more classroom resources continuing to be a priority. There is still work to be done refining schemes of work and improving assessment and monitoring to meet the challenge of raising standards, particularly those of the boys.

146 **Business studies**

- 43 Attainment in business studies at Key Stage 4 is broadly equivalent to that of schools nationally. Students performed in line with national expectation for the year 1998 but slightly below the national average for 1999. Just under half of the students achieved A* to C grades. In lessons, the higher attaining students use technical business terms with confidence and are able to solve problems independently, making use of a range of sources. Average attaining students are able to identify the relevant theory but use more general terms to explain the concept; for example, when discussing pricing strategies, they referred to 'what others charged' rather than referring to the concept of competitive pricing. Lower attainers place a greater reliance on the information and guidance provided by the teacher. Students taking the General National Vocational Qualification course (GNVQ) are able to apply their limited knowledge to real situations, for example, when visiting a local garage to question the owner on aspects of the business. Higher attaining students demonstrated their ability to phrase supplementary questions, relevant to the business and enhanced their research. Lower attaining students are able to formulate, with guidance, appropriate questions but have difficulty reformulating if earlier answers have covered the subject in question. The quality of note taking varies and is directly related to the literacy level of the pupil. Students with special educational needs attain in line with their ability.
- 44 Sixth form students taking A level business studies broadly match the attainment of sixth formers nationally for grades A to C and exceed the national expectation for grades A to E. Students taking GNVQ Intermediate Business performed above the national expectation, producing a course completion rate well above that seen across the country. This was an improvement on the previous year. Students on the A level course are able to analyse with confidence, using the range of standard ratios, making reasoned judgements about the soundness of companies based on their analysis. Higher attainers were articulate in their judgement of the value of such financial analysis, recognising the shortcomings of the information gained. The highest attaining Year 13 students can identify clearly the implications of business activities in terms of their social, economic and political impact on

the country, whereas those attaining at a lower level are less analytical and evaluative in presenting their research findings. GNVQ students have a sound understanding of course requirements including grading criteria. They have knowledge of customer service and can relate it to the workplace, having recently returned from work experience. Higher attainers make full use of the opportunities to gather data, for example through work experience diaries, whilst those attaining at a lower level have minimal information recorded with which to complete the element of work.

- 45 There is a significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls within the GCSE results for 1999, where boys out performed girls. This is a reversal of previous years and at variance with the performance of boys in other subjects across the school and nationally. It does not reflect current evidence from observation and work scrutiny where girls' attainment is above that of boys. The same is not true in sixth form groups where no significant differences are seen.
- 46 Students at Key Stage 4 make satisfactory progress in the majority of lessons and good progress in some. They apply knowledge gained in previous lessons accurately, for example they were able to justify a decision taken on recruitment of staff, following a mock interview, having used a criteria based system and taken into account candidate performance. Higher attaining students recognised and could explain the value and shortcomings of a points system. Year 11 students were able to apply their knowledge of the product life cycle to current products, predicting possible extension strategies and the effect they would have on the shape of the curve. Students in sixth form classes make satisfactory progress in the majority of lessons and good progress in some. Where good progress was made students applied their knowledge and understanding of ratios to a company, analysing the financial data to establish how well the company was performing. They used previous learning from other sections of the course to help in the analysis. Students have satisfactory competence in numeracy, which supports the business studies well. Students following the GNVQ programme meet the requirements of the course effectively. They plan their approach to assignments satisfactorily, ensuring that the research activities will match the assessment criteria. Students with special educational needs make progress in line with others in their groups, using the teacher guidance and materials available competently.
- 47 The previous report highlighted positive attitudes towards the subject, which continue with students keen to explain the purpose of the work in which they are involved. They show a maturity of attitude in group discussions, once settled, and are supportive of one another when involved in group work or role play. Students sustain concentration well when tasks provide adequate challenge. One Year 10 group was less focussed when asked to cut out advertisements and paste them into their folders, work which was insufficiently challenging. Relationships with others in their group and staff are good. Sixth form students interact well with the staff and, although in small groups, contribute fully to the sessions. Examples of poor concentration and application were in rooms specifically equipped with computers, containing little desk space for written work. The layout made it difficult for students to see the teacher. Overall, the good relationships students enjoy with the teaching staff undoubtedly enhance the quality of their work.
- 48 As at the time of the last inspection, teaching in business studies is all at least satisfactory and in some lessons, it is good. Knowledge of the subject is good. The enthusiasm shown by teachers for their subject is a strength and influences the way in which their teaching is received. Where teaching is good, the pace of the lesson is right, relationships ensure that there is a mutual respect between teacher and students and the work is pitched at a level that stimulates the student. Examples used to illustrate relevant theory are current, for example the use of the morning broadsheets with Year 13 students, and presented in a way which is accessible to all levels of student. Where teaching is no more than satisfactory, the students are taught using a more limited range of teaching strategies, with a heavy teacher contribution. The result is that they have fewer opportunities to enhance their understanding and develop the skills of independent learning. Documentation relating to the planning of courses and lessons is a strength of business studies. Schemes of work provide adequate detail of content, methodology and resources in order to ensure consistency in the teaching of the courses. The teaching base is good with the exception of IT room that lacks adequate alternative workspace for students. General access to computer equipment is adequate to satisfy the needs of the courses although some of the computer equipment is dated.

- 49 Resources in the department are adequate, with a good range of textbooks to which students have access. The management of the department is effectively carried out by a head of department who also co-ordinates the vocational education programme across the school. Development planning is addressing the needs of both key stages for the coming year and the introduction of further vocational programmes will ensure that Key Stage 4 students can progress onto appropriate courses in the sixth form.

Design and technology

- 50 National Curriculum assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998 and 1999 were reported as being below national expectations, but during the inspection attainment was found to be broadly in line with national expectations overall. Girls, however, attain higher standards than boys. Students' attainment is higher in making skills than in design, as the latter attainment target is less well developed. Most students make good quality products in food, textiles and resistant materials and handle materials, tools and equipment competently. The quality of graphics work is sound in resistant materials, and students use numeracy skills well through use of accurate drawings, measurements and cutting materials. Students' research and investigation skills in design are developed better in food than in the other contributing subjects. In Year 9, students develop a specification for a healthy Pizza, through research and investigation including surveys, which they will make and then evaluate against their own criteria. Whilst doing this they gain an insight into industrial practices.
- 51 Not all students took design and technology at Key Stage 4 in 1998 and 1999. GCSE results in 1998 for those students who did were just in line with national average overall with students attaining higher in food than in resistant materials or graphics. Performance in 1999 was higher and was above national average for those students who took design and technology, with the highest attainment in graphics. Girls attained higher results than boys overall in both years. Attainment at the end of the key stage is broadly in line with national expectations and students' attainment is similar in design and making in all the contributing subjects. Higher attaining students are more able to develop good research and investigation skills outside of their own immediate environment. GCSE results in child development were well below national average in 1998 and 1999. However the individual students' results were in line with or better than their results in other subjects.
- 52 A level results in design and technology for 1998 and 1999 were lower than national average in the higher grades, but overall grades improved in 1999. A level results in home economics were well below national expectations in 1999. During the inspection standards were found to be nearer the national expectation in all sixth form courses. Students' standards of graphicacy are good and they use rendering techniques well and show evidence of good original research for their major projects. Most students in Years 12 and 13 are very articulate in explaining their work and use technical language appropriately.
- 53 Progress is satisfactory at both Key Stages and in the sixth form. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to other students, particularly in practical skills as they are well supported by their teachers. Students are able to consolidate and reapply practical skills and knowledge as they progress across Key Stage 3 and into Key Stage 4. Progress is better in the design element as students progress across Key Stage 4, and higher attaining students develop good research, analytical and evaluation skills which they use well in their GCSE coursework. In the sixth form students make satisfactory progress in understanding of specific needs outside of their own experience.
- 54 At both key stages and in the sixth form, students show enjoyment of their work and in some lessons there is a real buzz of enthusiasm. Behaviour is good overall and students use potentially dangerous tools and equipment appropriately. All students work well together and there is a good rapport between students themselves and the teachers. Students listen well to the teacher and to other students and respect other students' ideas.
- 55 Teaching is predominantly satisfactory, and some good and very good teaching was seen during the inspection, but a very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was also observed. Teachers have good knowledge, understanding and skills in the subjects they teach and are committed and

enthusiastic. Where teaching is good or very good (as it is in a third of lessons overall), and in some of the satisfactory lessons, work is well planned and teachers share the aims and expected outcomes with students at the start of the lesson. Questions are used well to target specific students, and in some lessons there are timed tasks to keep students motivated and make effective use of time and resources. Where teaching is weaker, time and resources are used less effectively and the organisation and management of students, especially with regard to health and safety, is less secure. Marking of students' work is variable. In the best marking, in food, students are given constructive comments and targets to help them improve their work and all spellings are corrected.

- 56 Leadership in design and technology, shared between the co-ordinator and the head of food and textiles, is sound and there is a clear vision for the future. Students are given a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3, but there is a need to track jointly students' experiences and capability across the whole key stage. At present, use of information technology is not well developed, due to outdated resources, and there are lost opportunities for students' learning to be supported by the use of up to date technology in both key stages and in the sixth form. There are health and safety concerns in all design and technology areas and these have been notified to the school. One resistant materials room, in particular, is very cluttered with heavy machinery and not at all conducive to good learning in a safe environment.
- 57 There has been sound progress since the last report. Students are developing better problem solving skills, particularly in food where they are given a wider design brief allowing them to take more responsibility for their own research and investigation. Teachers have realistic and appropriate expectations of what pupils can achieve and there is good support for lower attaining students to help them attain appropriately. Time is used appropriately in sixth form lessons and students are being challenged. There is an improvement in standards of design and there are some good accurate drawings, but there is still some underachievement amongst boys. Teaching is at least satisfactory in food and textiles and in most of the resistant materials and graphics lessons.

Geography

- 58 At the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of students attaining the nationally expected standards is slightly below average. Significant minorities attain above or well above average standards. In general, girls achieve significantly more highly than boys. Students have a sound knowledge of places they have studied and of the human and physical factors which lead to differences in areas within the same country, for example North and South Italy. By the end of the key stage they know and understand technical vocabulary. They use atlases, interpret maps, graphs and photographs and apply these skills to the study of places and themes. High attaining students produce written work of quality; for example, in an extended assignment about the climate of Italy.
- 59 At the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment in lessons and in current work is in line with the national average, although GCSE results overall remain well below the average. Girls attain significantly more highly than boys, both in lessons and in examinations in which their attainment is close to, although still below national expectation. By the end of Year 11 students have developed skills of geographical enquiry and use fieldwork techniques to develop their understanding of geographical ideas, for example in the study of Llandudno town centre. They construct a range of complex maps and diagrams to present data and to explain patterns in physical and human geography.
- 60 Standards attained by students following the GCE A level syllabus are in line with expectations for the course. In 1999 all students gained at least a pass grade. Attainment in assignments and in the day to day work in their files is consistently of sound A level standard.
- 61 Students generally make good progress in each key stage although this is slower than average in Year 7 where students have only one lesson per week and cover insufficient ground. More time is available for Year 8 and 9 and consequently more progress is made here. Year 7 students begin to understand the effects that earthquakes have on buildings and people although they find the theory of plate tectonics difficult to understand. By Year 9 they are beginning to understand the complex physical and human geographical processes which interact to make one region different from another.

Students of high attainment make very good progress in Year 9. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall, especially when supported by other students in group work or by the class teacher and learning support assistants. Boys make significantly less progress than girls do overall, especially in the early years when their application to work is less evident and their attention span limited. At Key stage 4 students make progress in the handling and interpreting of data both in lessons and in their fieldwork. Sixth form students make good progress in their lessons, for example, in the study of multinational companies and the reasons for their location in different parts of the world.

62 Scrutiny of students' work and observation of lessons indicate that teaching at each key stage and in the sixth form is good overall. In over half the lessons teaching is good, it is occasionally very good and never less than satisfactory. Teaching is securely based on good subject knowledge and, in most lessons a real enthusiasm for the subject. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of students' interest and enthusiasm. Interest is sustained by the variety of approaches used, which encourage the active involvement of students in their learning without sacrificing the rigour of the study, for example, group work in Year 8 leading to the presentation of weather forecasts by groups of students to the whole class. High expectations are reinforced effectively, for example, in the careful marking and detailed, helpful comments on students' work. Teachers make good use of resources such as television broadcasts, overhead projectors and textbooks, and they produce assignment sheets and information sheets, which are generally of a good quality. The organisation of students into small mixed ability groups for some activities is effective in helping all students make progress. Homework is well used to promote the skills of independent learning. Teaching in the sixth form is good especially when students are expected to contribute significantly to discussion. Where teaching is only satisfactory, the pace of lessons is slow and there is insufficient variety of activity within the lesson. Management of students' behaviour and application to work is sometimes not sufficiently rigorous.

63 Attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good overall at all stages. Students are generally well motivated and participate enthusiastically in most lessons. A number of classes, mostly in Key Stage 3, have a significant proportion of students who are easily distracted. Where they are managed energetically this does not affect the progress of the class as a whole. Students, including those with special educational needs, are familiar with working in small groups and do so effectively. They also respond well to field trips, for example the Key Stage 4 trip to Llandudno.

64 The department is organised effectively and staff work well as a team. Appropriate targets have been set in the development plan, which now needs to be extended over a longer time frame. The aims of the department are thoughtful and have led to the revision of some elements of the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Further developments should take account of the revised National Curriculum. Assessment techniques are gradually being broadened to give students greater opportunity to expand on what they know and understand. Records of current assessments are kept centrally but as yet are not used systematically by the department to monitor students' progress over time and to plan for their future development. Assessment at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is sound. The close grouping of three of the four geography rooms promotes the exchange of good practice. Effective use is made of displays of students' work to set standards and provide a resource for teaching and learning. Most resources in the department are adequate but there are insufficient textbooks at Key Stages 3 and 4 for students to take them home. Access to computers is also inadequate and limits the students' entitlement to this useful tool for learning.

History

65 Attainment in history is in line with national expectations across all three key stages. However, the proportion of boys reaching the expected National Curriculum Level 5 in teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 is significantly below that for girls. There is a similar picture at Key Stage 4 where the recent GCSE results in history at A* to C grades are close to national averages and higher than the average results for the school in all other subjects but, within these comparisons, girls out-perform the boys. There are insufficient candidates at GCE 'A' Level to make a reliable statistical comparison with national results but student grades are broadly in line with national expectation.

- 66 A feature of the work in history is the way in which students develop their enquiry skills and can seek sources of information, which are useful for a particular task. Students in Year 7 are able to give their own account of events leading up to the battle of Hastings in 1066 by examining the source materials. In Year 8, students of average and above average attainment are competent in playing a board game that relates to religious belief in Tudor times. Most were able to recognise the advantages of sharing the same faith as the monarch when faith alternated between Catholic and Protestant, in order to avoid prison, torture or death. Some below average attaining students do not fully understand the vocabulary or lack the numeracy skills when asked to list information into categories. By Year 9 the majority of students can use historical evidence to write an imaginary letter about a soldier's life in the trenches of the Great War. High attaining students produce well-structured written work on a range of topics, such as how propaganda was used to get men to join up and fight. Lower attaining students are capable of explaining some of the events leading up to the war, but have difficulty in working out the chronological sequence of some of the sources. Average attaining students write more concise accounts, such as comparing the contributions made by James Watt and Matthew Boulton in the making of the steam engine.
- 67 Students attain well at Key Stage 4. They display good knowledge and understanding, can recall and build on previous work and their communication skills are good. This was seen in Year 11 where students of high and average attainment showed good evaluation and observation skills in examining historical photographs of the American Plains and explaining the driving forces behind the homesteaders. In Year 10, high attaining students can write fluently on the benefits arising from the development of a public health system in Rome. The average attaining students are inclined to be more descriptive and the lower attaining students show competence in following a more structural script. Some low attaining students follow a course leading to a Certificate of Achievement and show competence in drafting their written work on the computer. Little use of numeracy is made in history apart from block graphs, which are used effectively. Use of information technology is in its early stages and students' skills are not yet well developed. This is evident in the text of the personal studies on Grove House which are not enhanced by graphical illustrations. A small number of students produce homework that is word-processed.
- 68 In the sixth form there is the expected level of analytical arguments in students' essays and document work. In Year 12 students are able to interpret a variety of sources, including protest music in coming to an opinion as to their reliability. In Year 13, students are able to draw on their knowledge in relating political theory, such as communism to historical events. The file notes of students, particularly the high attainers, are well structured and indexed which provide an adequate basis for revision and examination preparation.
- 69 Overall progress is sound, at Key Stage 3. By the end of Year 9, students' enquiry and communication skills have improved, as seen in well-balanced imaginative accounts drawing on source material. Good examples of imaginative writing were seen in Year 9 on the living conditions of slaves on the plantations in America. Progress is sound rather than good because it is inconsistent. In some classes observed a minority of students did not work steadily because of minor disruption by a small minority of boys who did not find the work stimulating. Significant progress was seen in Year 7 classes by students of average attainment because of the structure of the teaching programme, which is co-ordinated by a literacy programme.
- 70 At Key Stage 4 the progress of students is often good and at least satisfactory in lessons. By the end of the key stage students are able to develop a wide range of writing styles and give a more balanced view of historical events, drawing on information from a range of sources. The higher attainers are competent in undertaking independent study in producing well-structured written work for their personal study. There is limited progress in drafting skills and the use of statistical information. Students of average attainment make at least satisfactory progress in the construction of concise writing that is often numbered. The progress of students who are low attainers or have special educational needs is satisfactory although some find difficulty in coping with some of the technical vocabulary, such as in the study of medicine through the ages. Progress in the sixth form is consistently good. This is achieved in no small part by the skilful use of questions to challenge thinking and the build up of course notes in the preparation to essays. The majority of students word-process their essays but there is no re-drafting.

- 71 Students generally have positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy their lessons and behaviour was good in most of the lessons seen. Students willingly respond to questions and work well together in small groups. Concentration is usually sustained throughout the written work although some minor disruptions occurred in a small number of classes in Key Stage 3. The majority of students takes care with work and generally shows respect for each other, particularly in the sixth form. There are good relationships between teachers and students. There is much enthusiasm for role-play activities.
- 72 Teaching is good overall. It is mostly satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and mostly good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of history is a strength. Good teaching is characterised by thorough preparation, well-researched notes and good pupil management. Teachers skilfully question pupils on their understanding which helps them to consolidate and build on their skills. The department's policy of having different activities and a mix of individual, group and whole class work was clearly visible and effective in the best lessons. The other aspects of teaching, pupil management, planning, organisation and assessment are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and better as pupils move up the school. In a few lessons at Key Stage 3 the pace was not brisk enough to present challenge and enable the setting of challenging targets.
- 73 The curriculum meets statutory requirements and the time given to history is adequate. The department has identified areas where improvements are needed. Since the last inspection more rigour and coherence have been put into the history modules of study in Key Stage 3 and more attention paid to historical skills. This will be further enhanced by planned developments in the use of information technology. The use of assessment is more secure, but the use of data for curriculum planning is not yet sufficiently developed to improve both teaching and student performances. Schemes of work have been designed for history to make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. Field study visits are organised in Years 7 to 10 but follow up work is not possible because only a proportion of pupils are able to attend.
- 74 The department is well led and a team approach is fostered. . The documentation in the departmental handbook is exemplary. There are good resources and accommodation for present purposes and they are used effectively to assist learning. The number opting for history at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form has declined recently, an issue for the review of A level work for September 2000. Another potential area for development is closer links with the wider community to broaden students' experience of the range of sources available.

Information technology (IT)

- 75 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is well below the nationally expected level. In the separate IT lessons seen during the inspection attainment is just below national expectations for communicating and handling information and modelling, but well below for control and students have no 'hands on' experience of measuring. In these lessons students use word processing, desktop publishing, databases and spreadsheets. In a Year 8 lesson, students were using a spreadsheet to calculate a wage bill for Manchester United, but not all students could work out for themselves the formula to use. All students have sound generic skills and can log on and off, load programs, save and print. There is little evidence of drafting and redrafting of work using the computer and students do not annotate their work for future reference.
- 76 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is below the nationally expected level overall, as students do not experience control and measuring. All students now take a CLAIT course in Key Stage 4 and some are taking a GCSE course. For these students, attainment in communicating and handling information and modelling is generally in line with standards expected for the course they are studying. Most students use word processing, desktop publishing, databases and spreadsheets competently. Students studying for GCSE have good knowledge and understanding of the use of IT in society and the world of business and can discuss the social and moral issues connected with this widespread use.
- 77 GNVQ students attain satisfactorily in Key Skills. Some sixth form students choose to take an RSA course in Computer Aided design and over the last few years most attain a Pass and some a Merit or

Distinction. Students who choose this option use graphics from different sources, including the use of a digital camera and Internet. Most A level students in Year 12 are attaining satisfactory standards, at this stage, in the course run by New College and are able to consider the use of IT within the commercial world. Sixth form students in IT-based courses are very articulate in explaining the development of their work.

- 78 Progress for all students, including those with special educational needs, at both key stages is satisfactory during the separate IT lessons but it is unsatisfactory overall as students are not given sufficient opportunities to develop their skills and competencies. There is no planned continuity and progression from Key Stage 2 into Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4, students consolidate and improve on skills and knowledge learnt in Key stage 3 in communicating and handling information and modelling, but have no opportunities to make progress with control or measuring. Students in Year 12 are making good progress in the A level course considering the low skills and knowledge base from which they come. Students with special educational needs have computers and some specific software to support their progress.
- 79 Students show very positive attitudes to IT and most work well in the separate IT lessons. Behaviour is generally satisfactory in Key Stage 3, and good or very good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students make good progress when they work collaboratively alongside other students and share computers amicably. Not all are confident in their use of IT, however. There is a good rapport between students themselves and with their teachers, particularly in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There is increasing use of the Internet by students in order to research topics. A number of students use computers at home to present their work for other curriculum subjects and develop their personal knowledge.
- 80 Teaching is at least satisfactory with some good or very good teaching in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Planning of IT lessons is not well co-ordinated in Key Stage 3 and little account is taken of students' previous experiences. Teachers of the separate IT lessons have good knowledge, skills and understanding. In the good or very good lessons planning is secure and there are extension tasks for higher attaining students. These teachers make good use of questions to extend students' thinking and share the expected outcomes of the lesson with them. Most lessons use time and resources appropriately. There is little written assessment of students' work in Key Stage 3, but there is some good marking with constructive comment to help students improve in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- 81 The school is not meeting statutory requirements for information technology at either Key Stage. There is no co-ordination for planning, monitoring, tracking, recording and assessing students IT experiences and capability across the curriculum. Few curriculum subjects include opportunities for students to use IT in their schemes of work and there is little use of IT outside of the separate lessons in order to give breadth and depth to students learning experiences in IT. Mathematics uses graphical calculators and all Year 10 students experience spreadsheets. Languages teachers regularly give opportunities for lower attaining students to use IT. Subject development plans do not include IT in many cases. Resources are unsatisfactory. The student: computer ratio is much lower than the national average and many of the computers are ageing. There is a lack of a scanner and good colour printer in the school.
- 82 Since the last inspection the quality of teaching in separate IT lessons has improved. Overall attainment is below national expectations at both key stages. The use and provision of IT is still underdeveloped and there is still no manageable system for recording and assessing across the curriculum.

Modern languages (French, German)

- 83 Overall standards at Key Stage 3 are below average, and similar in both languages. In 1999, teachers correctly assessed attainment below the national average figures. Current inspection evidence shows a similar picture. Some higher attaining students are of above average standard in their first modern language, on course for National Curriculum Level 5 and above by the end of the key stage. They use and adapt prior learning confidently and accurately. They distinguish tenses, and write extended

paragraphs on their family and interests. Listening comprehension is average overall. Most higher attaining students understand the foreign language spoken authentically and at pace. Others understand at least details in short recorded dialogues. Reading comprehension is below average. Students can follow simple text and match it to sound, but most find it difficult to decode unfamiliar text. Writing is average. Typically students write sentences and phrases accurately following a model, and some can produce short paragraphs. Speaking is below average. Some high attainers know what to say but are reticent. All students can take part in short dialogues, but very few can say other than set phrases without the support of text. Lower attainers can say a relevant reply in answer to known questions.

- 84 At Key Stage 4, overall standards are average when compared with similar schools. Over three years they have improved at a similar rate to elsewhere. Standards in French in 1999 were slightly above average. Comparison of standards in German over the same period is invalid since it is only since 1997 that it has been taken by the whole ability range. Over this time, the proportion of German A* to C passes has improved to slightly below average. The department's predictions of performance are broadly accurate. Although students do less well compared with their other subjects, the difference in 1998 was less than was the case nationally. Currently, some higher attainers are at expected high levels. In their writing they use a range of tenses in, for example, accounts of a holiday or letters of complaint to a hotel. They speak at length on prepared topics, the best using past tenses accurately. As at Key Stage 3, however, reading and speaking skills are undeveloped across the attainment range, and pronunciation is poor. Few students write or speak confidently beyond prepared statements. At both key stages some students in the middle range of attainment produce below average standards. Typically they understand simple recordings and texts, but few deduce the broader meaning accurately, and are too dependent on text to support their speaking. Girls outperform boys by a greater margin than nationally.
- 85 Sixth form GCE A level standards meet course requirements, with some students achieving the highest (A/B) grades each year in French. Entries are usually very small in German. In a small sample of work and lessons, current standards in Year 12 are average. Some students in both French and German find the transition from GCSE very demanding but others learn successfully to express ideas, for example, on divorce, and to use required complex structures. Coursework in Year 13 shows achievement at the highest levels as in a French reader for young children and German poetry in response to a textual stimulus. During the week of inspection it was not possible to inspect the work of students on the newly introduced Business French (FLAW) course or to observe the full range of standards in AL classes in Year 12. Many students in each language were on their seven-week block of study in Bordeaux.
- 86 Progress through both Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory given the below average levels of literacy of many students on entry. Girls learn more effectively than boys. In Key Stage 3, higher attaining students make good gains in their first modern language, but progress in the second language is unsatisfactory because of inadequate curriculum time. Most other students progress as expected, although most do not speak enough to reinforce their learning effectively. In general, students do not learn to behave as speakers of a foreign language. They do not expect to have to memorise and reapply the simple patterns they practise. Nevertheless, those with the most significant learning needs make good gains in listening and speaking, and, when tasks are suitably designed and support provided, in reading and writing. Over Key Stage 4, progress accelerates a little for some dual linguists, because they have more lessons, and for the lowest attainers, because of the support and incentive provided by the alternative examination course. Many students in the middle range, however, do not build well enough on prior learning. Progress in the sixth form is good. From an uncertain start, students with a generally insecure grammar base learn to use a range of resources, such as the Internet or German television via the satellite link, and to speak and write across a range of styles, including poetry and literary criticism.
- 87 In lessons, most students make satisfactory or good progress where teaching consolidates previous learning. Where progress is either slow or, occasionally unsatisfactory, teaching is not good enough to compensate either for inadequate curriculum time, or for a significant element of low motivation and interest in Years 9 and 10 stemming from students' prior experiences. Recent instability of staffing has disturbed continuity, and progress is further interrupted when the two weekly lessons are

timetabled on consecutive days.

- 88 Attitudes are satisfactory overall. Many students are enthusiastic in Year 7 and in top sets in Years 8 and 9. In Year 9, in both a top German set and the boys' French class, students are excited to be learning a language. Students concentrate well in the long lessons and most behave well. Some are merely compliant when teaching is not inspiring. They enjoy authentic tasks and memory games, and work well in pairs. Relationships are good throughout. Students use dictionaries well and in Key Stage 4 record their own cassettes. The very highest attainers develop well as independent learners in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Many students with special educational needs show determination, encouraged by success in understanding and speaking, and use computers in Year 10. The proportion of students opting for a second modern language in Year 10 is in line with national figures and A Level French classes are viable. Nonetheless, the subject is still not popular enough given the level of investment of curriculum time in Key Stage 3. Although most students are conscientious, and complete their written work with care, the level of interest in languages is relatively low. Self-confidence is low in speaking at each key stage and the development of skills is slow. Some average attainers in Years 9 and 10 do not have the perseverance to persist when challenged to think for themselves or deduce from the unfamiliar. Below the highest attainers in Key Stage 4, students are still very teacher-dependent, many with little control over their use of language. Some dual linguists in Year 9 show very different attitudes towards each language, very positive in German, neutral at best in French.
- 89 Teaching is at least satisfactory. A third is good or very good. There are some weaknesses, but no unsatisfactory lessons were observed. Common strengths ensure that students learn effectively in lessons. Activities have a clear purpose and are usually matched appropriately to the students' learning needs. Time and resources are used well. In the Year 11 dual linguists' German set, for example, a busy, purposeful pace was maintained with groups working at different levels. In a Year 7 French class and a Year 8 German top set, assured technique with the overhead projector challenged students to pronounce and then recall new vocabulary at speed. In Year 10, students with special educational needs used computers to reinforce understanding of medical complaints and remedies. The best teaching has panache, pace and humour. It conveys a clear message that all students, from the highest attainers to those with special educational needs, learn best and enjoy languages most when they hear the language spoken all lesson and can speak it for fun and purpose. This teaching skilfully adapts the spoken language to the attainment of the class, and provides activities in which students use the language authentically, such as finding out or conveying information in pairs. Where there are weaknesses, they are often in classes where provision in previous years has been inappropriate or current timetabling arrangements unhelpful. The cumulative effect impairs progress. The use of the foreign language for normal communication is still inconsistent. Too much unnecessary English, particularly in Year 7 and with some higher ability classes in all other years, lowers challenge and conveys wrong expectations. There is insufficient planning for individual need in those mixed-ability classes in Key Stage 4 composed of students with a wide range of prior experience. In these cases, higher attainers are unchallenged. Some teaching consolidates new learning through text too quickly at the expense of more extensive listening and speaking practice. Occasionally, in Year 7, not enough attention is paid to accuracy of pronunciation in choral repetition. Marking is irregular, with little diagnostic comment.
- 90 There is much that is positive in the faculty. Leadership is sound and teamwork a strength. The head of department is resourceful under the pressures of current staffing instability. Staff work hard to raise the status of the subject, and broaden horizons. The Dialogue 2000 link with Bordeaux has much potential. Curriculum and assessment meet statutory requirements, and KS3 assessment procedures are good. Since the last inspection good progress has been made in several areas. There is now good alternative provision in both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. New, high quality accommodation and sound reproduction benefit standards of listening. Students' awareness is heightened by the posting of National Curriculum levels in each room, foreign language signing around the school and displays, including regular updates of television soap operas.
- 91 However, there are still weaknesses. Teaching has improved since the last report, but needs to be more consistently motivating and effective if improvement is to be maintained. Monitoring of teaching and marking is inadequate, lacking both frequency and rigour. Examination results have

been analysed for a number of years, but data are not yet used sufficiently to monitor the progress of students through and between key stages. Arrangements for second language provision in Key Stage 3 are unsatisfactory. The application of information technology needs to be incorporated in the schemes of work. The faculty has the capacity to continue its improvement.

Music

- 92 Attainment in music at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the national expectation. Most students read simple staff notation. Pupils of higher attainment have good ensemble skills but the unsatisfactory keyboard fluency of pupils of average attainment restricts their ensemble skills and the scope of their melodic composition. Younger students, using imaginative vocal techniques, composed highly creative, atmospheric ensemble pieces which demonstrated good understanding of the elements of music, and good listening skills. Higher attaining students quickly organised their ideas and went on to refine the outcomes. Students in Year 7 understand the concepts of ostinati, drone and pentatonic melody but few listen sufficiently critically to the musical effect of their pieces. The use of appropriate subject language is undeveloped. Standards of singing are good. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is in line with national averages. Recent GCSE results, with very small groups, have been good, and numbers taking the course have increased significantly this year. Students of higher attainment compose conventional but attractive, properly structured pieces for a variety of different instruments. Lower attaining students employ techniques they have learned to create simple but musically logical pieces. Standards of performing within these small groups are in line with students' different experience; most students play moderately demanding repertoire with adequate confidence and a sense of communication. Standards of listening and appraising are inconsistent; students do not readily build on their practical experience to develop their confidence in more demanding tasks such as melodic and rhythmic dictation.
- 93 Students enter the school with a little experience of practical music making, and few students learn musical instruments. Progress across Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. Students in Year 9 make particularly good progress in aural development. Higher attaining students make good progress in acquiring fluency in keyboard work and average attaining students make good progress in reading skills and in understanding the match of harmony to melody, but unsatisfactory progress in ensemble skills because of a lack of adequate technique. Progress in composing is inconsistent. Students make good progress in the imaginative use of sound to create sensitive, atmospheric pieces but unsatisfactory progress in tasks involving conventional melodic ideas. Almost all students make good progress in singing throughout the key stage although the progress of boys declines towards the end. The progress made by students with special educational needs varies according to their individual needs. Those students who have short attention spans make unsatisfactory progress when required to work independently because of lack of sufficient support. The progress of higher attaining students in Key Stage 4 both in composing and in performing, as they develop confidence and the ability to communicate ideas imaginatively, is good. Students of average attainment who do not have the advantage of playing orchestral instruments make good progress in both composing and performing but barely satisfactory progress in listening and appraising.
- 94 Students have predominantly positive attitudes to music. They arrive promptly at lessons, settle to work quickly and concentrate well, particularly when given the opportunity to work independently on challenging, imaginative tasks. Students co-operate well with each other and relationships are very good. However, some younger students are slow to settle, quickly become restless and waste time between activities. Their work rate is erratic and at times they do not handle equipment with sufficient care.
- 95 The quality of teaching in both key stages, satisfactory at the last inspection, is good or very good. Teachers are well informed and lessons are delivered at a good pace and often in a charismatic manner which effectively communicates teachers' commitment and enthusiasm for the subject. In the lessons on voice in Year 8, students' attention and imagination were challenged to great effect and the outcomes displayed high levels of perception and sensitivity. Management of students is also very good, and students with behaviour difficulties are sensitively handled, although occasionally over-demanding students impede the flow of the lesson somewhat. Planning does not always take sufficient account of the needs of higher attaining students and the nature of keyboard tasks sometimes restricts

students' creative development. Students' work is regularly assessed and the department is currently developing a system that will more effectively assess the progress of individual students. End-of-year reports do not contain adequate reference to the attainment targets of the National Curriculum for music. The quality of teaching for the fifty students who learn orchestral instruments is good.

- 96 Music now receives an adequate allocation of time, and since the previous inspection accommodation has improved, although there is still a serious shortage of storage space for larger instruments. Provision for the use of information technology is unsatisfactory, the department's budget is too low to meet this shortcoming, and the development plan does not include financial planning for the immediate and future needs of the department. Staff provide many opportunities for students to make music together by organising weekly rehearsals of instrumental and vocal groups, an annual musical show, the service of Nine Lessons and Carols and various other events both in school and in the local community. Musicians give their time to play for the town's Christmas Eve carol concert and a group of girls is taking part in the local choral society's performance of "Elijah". Each year a group of around twenty students enjoys a week's music making at the school's outdoor centre in the Lake District.

Physical education (PE)

- 97 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is at least in line with, and occasionally exceeds, national expectations. Key Stage 3 students have a satisfactory mastery of basic skills and a sound knowledge and understanding of the principles of play in hockey, football, netball and rugby. In movement work, students have satisfactory body control and produce imaginative movement sequences in dance lessons. At the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment in the games seen, (hockey, football and badminton), matches national expectations and they show appropriate development of skills and team play.
- 98 Examination results in GCSE (PE) in 1998 and 1999, in which over 60 per cent of students entered obtained passes at A* to C level, were very significantly better than the national average for all maintained schools, where the A* to C pass levels were 47.9 per cent and 51 per cent respectively. Work seen of current students indicates that this improvement will be maintained in the future.
- 99 Boys and girls of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, are making good progress in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory or better progress in Key Stage 4. Students are learning new skills and consolidating them well; they are developing a good knowledge and understanding in a wide range of physical activities. The behaviour and response of most students in both key stages is generally good, though there are exceptions and a few students lose concentration and are easily distracted. Students have generally positive attitudes and most of them apply themselves diligently to the tasks sets. Relationships are good and students work co-operatively in groups and teams.
- 100 The quality of teaching is good in both key stages. The teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subject. They have a good rapport with students and classes are very competently managed. Lessons are well prepared and include appropriately structured practices to develop the work. Much of the teaching is direct, positive and effective; in some lessons opportunities were provided for students to take responsibility for their own learning and use their initiative. Appropriate grouping and individual help satisfactorily caters for students of different abilities. In some lessons, however, insufficient consideration is given to this aspect. Best practice was exemplified in a Year 7 hockey lesson. There, the teacher's expertise and confident, stimulating and encouraging approach, allied with a very good rapport with students, effective class management and structured practices, appropriate for students of all abilities, resulted in students making good progress in developing their skills in a lively and enjoyable session.
- 101 The curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements, in respect of the range of aspects offered and programmes of study, in both Key Stages 3 and 4. However, those students in Year 8 and 9 who opt to study a second foreign language are denied equality of access and opportunity in physical education as they are unable to follow the same programme as other students in the inadequate time allocated to them for the subject. This has an inevitable impact on what they can achieve in the time

available. An opportunity is provided in the timetable for Year 12 students to participate in recreational games and sports, and many take advantage of this.

- 102 The extensive and successful extra-curricular sports programmes augments the PE curriculum and helps to raise standards; many students, boys and girls, benefit from this provision. The accommodation for physical education is good and enhances the learning, encouraging higher standards.
- 103 The department is effectively managed and led and the staff has created a positive learning environment. The department is providing good value for money. Since the last inspection the high quality of the teaching has been maintained. There has been a very marked improvement in the GCSE examination results; changes in the options within that course have opened up opportunities for more students and the increased time allocated to Key Stage 4 has led to greater study in depth in the core programme.

Religious education (RE)

- 104 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the local agreed syllabus expectations, with some higher attaining students having a particularly good grasp of the relationship between religious beliefs and actions. When studying the four Noble Truths of Buddhism, for example, many students understand how the values the Truths express have contemporary relevance. Students' work in other parts of the RE curriculum show them similarly responding confidently to what they are being taught, as in the distinction between religious questions and questions about religion. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in GCSE religious studies is above the national average. In 1999, students achieved a higher proportion of grades A* to C than nationally, as they did in 1998. The small number of Year 11 students currently preparing for GCSE is working towards similarly good standards. For example, they understand the complexity of issues concerning abortion. All students in Year 11 follow a course based on the local agreed syllabus. Attainment in the topics they are studying, such as investigations of the concept of God and religious responses to the problem of suffering, is in line with expectation. However, as weekly lessons are provided for only half the year, the school's curriculum does not give sufficient coverage of the agreed syllabus requirements, and overall attainment is below the agreed syllabus expectation. The RE department does not provide a course in the sixth form to meet agreed syllabus requirements. A small number of students are preparing for GCE A level in religious studies. They are on track to achieve results in line with course requirements, achievements which would be higher than the previous two years. Comparisons of previous years' results with national figures are not valid due to the small number of students involved.
- 105 Progress at Key Stage 3 is at least satisfactory, and is often good, both in lessons and over longer periods of time. In a lesson on Advent, for example, students quickly reinforced and extended their knowledge and understanding of the New Testament events, while in another lesson they learnt that Christians use various forms of worship to express their commitment to God. Students' books show substantial work done this term, firmly based on the agreed syllabus. At Key Stage 4, progress in the GCSE course is good: students who have chosen this course are motivated to work hard. In the course that all students follow in Years 10 and 11, progress in lessons is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Good progress was made when students were preparing for an assessment in relation to their work on Christian belief and the alleviation of world poverty. In this lesson, as in a number of others, higher attaining students, more often girls than boys, made better progress due to the demands which the work made on their reading and writing skills. Progress over longer periods of time at Key Stage 4 is not satisfactory: insufficient curriculum time is the cause. However, within the various modules presently taught, students make at least satisfactory progress due to good planning and teaching, and to their own generally positive attitudes. Progress in the GCE A level course is good: students want to succeed and are helped by effective teaching. A course to meet the agreed syllabus requirements is not provided, in breach of statutory requirements. Throughout the school, students with special educational needs make generally satisfactory progress. Progress is better than this when the work and resources were carefully matched to their needs, as in a Year 9 lesson when students made good progress as they learnt about the beginnings of Buddhism.
- 106 Students' responses to the teaching of RE are good overall, and vary from unsatisfactory to very

good, with no significant differences between the key stages. Most students are very co-operative, work hard and show interest. They concentrate well during teaching and individual work, many readily answer questions and a few ask relevant questions of their own. Behaviour is predominantly very good so that little time is wasted during the majority of lessons. Students' work is mainly very carefully presented, showing that they take pride in their work. Occasionally, a few students do not behave well enough, and are a distraction to the rest of the class. In some lessons, students tend to be passive and a sizeable minority makes little effort to contribute to discussions: these are more often boys than girls.

- 107 Teaching observed during the inspection was good overall, varying from satisfactory to very good; it was good or better in just over half of these lessons. Good and very good teaching was seen at both key stages and in the sixth form. The main strengths relate to: teachers' knowledge of the subject matter and how to teach it effectively so that students learn both about religion and from religion; good expectations on the amount of progress students should make; teaching methods which maintain students' concentration; very good management of students' behaviour in a business-like and friendly atmosphere; good use of time so that the whole lesson is well used; the resources, many of which are school produced and of good quality, promote learning; some challenging questioning which makes students think; very good marking of students' work so that they know what to do to improve; and homework which links learning between lessons. Occasionally, teaching does not reach this good quality due to: planning of lessons which takes insufficient account of the range of attainment within the class; students are not kept working throughout the lesson; and questioning fails to engage all the students in answering questions and contributing to discussions. However, as strengths in teaching far outweigh weaknesses, teaching is making a significant contribution to students' progress and their positive attitudes to the study of RE, and to their personal development.
- 108 The subject is making a good contribution to students' personal development, though its full potential in this respect is hampered by insufficient curriculum time. Spiritual development is promoted well, for example through sensitively taught opportunities for students to develop empathy for people in Biblical stories and to think about non-material aspects of life, such as suffering and answers which religion can provide. Developing understanding of the relationship between beliefs and behaviour contributes to moral development. Cultural development is supported through good teaching of the world faiths, as is social development during the study of the impact of faith on contemporary issues, such as poverty.
- 109 The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is well planned and meets requirements. Planning for teaching the agreed syllabus at Key Stage 4 is developing well, but agreed syllabus requirements are not met fully, and not at all in the sixth form. An effective system for assessing students' progress is starting to be used and has much potential for consolidating learning as well as for providing information on progress. The recently appointed head of department has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to raise standards further, and intends to communicate this in a costed development plan, a matter raised at the previous inspection as needing attention. The departmental handbook is a useful document for focusing the efforts of the department. The generally good standards and quality of provision reported at the previous inspection have been maintained, and time for RE has been allocated at Key Stage 4, but not enough. No improvement has been made for teaching the agreed syllabus in the sixth form, though the commendable tradition of GCSE A level religious studies has continued, despite small groups.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 110 The inspection was carried out in the week beginning 29th November, 1999, by a team of fourteen inspectors. Prior to the inspection, they had spent considerable time in reading a large amount of material provided by the school. A pre-inspection parents' meeting was held, attended by 40 parents and inspectors analysed the responses from parents to the OfSTED questionnaire. Nine per cent of the parents returned a questionnaire.
- 111 During the inspection, inspectors saw further documentation that helped them to make judgements about the work of the school. They also held discussions with most of the governors, who kindly made themselves available individually and as a group, to cast further light on the workings of the school, and had interviews with all teachers with delegated special responsibilities, whether curriculum, teaching or management. Inspectors spent over 165 hours observing lessons in all subjects. This represented visits to 227 lessons.
- 112 Inspectors met with a representative sample of pupils and went through their work. In addition, inspectors were able to hold discussions with members of the sixth form and, informally, with a large number of younger pupils. In total, some eight hours of discussion with pupils took place.

Pupil data

	Number of students on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of students with statements of SEN	Number of students on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y13	1132	36	253	113

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y13)**

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	66
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.15

Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked each week	420.3

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	81%
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	22
	KS4	20

Financial data

Financial year:

1999

	£
Total Income	2,680,080
Total Expenditure	2,694,161
Expenditure per pupil	2510.87
Balance brought forward from previous year	-14,081
Balance carried forward to next year	0

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

1132

Number of questionnaires returned:

104

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	14	67	13	4	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	35	56	8	1	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	13	53	16	8	1
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	13	62	18	3	2
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	27	49	17	7	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	31	60	6	3	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	33	53	12	3	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	21	62	4	9	4
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	23	52	19	5	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	9	55	22	13	1
My child(ren) like(s) school	36	41	13	8	2